A WOMAN of HONOR

H. C. BUNNER

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A WOMAN OF HONOR

BY

H. C. BUNNER

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A WOMAN OF HONOR.

CHAPTER I.

A DUET BY WAY OF OVERTURE.

THE soft warm sunshine of the spring afternoon filtered through blue window shades, and filled the studio with a tender twilight. It was a long and lofty room, the walls of dark wood and the ceiling covered with cloudy dim frescoes. The heavy portières were of dull Eastern reds and browns; and from the brass rod serving as railing to the gallery which ran the whole length of the room depended deep-dyed curtains. All the light that entered the room came from the three windows above this gallery, and of two of these only the arched tops were visible over the high-hung draperies. The centre window was at the top of the little flight of stairs, and from this one an azure radiance streamed down upon the rug spread in the middle of the waxed floor, where Jack Carnegie stood by his easel, trifling with his new picture, with Cecil Kent at his side silently contemplating Lear and Cordelia with a coldly critical eye.

"Well?" said Carnegie, laying down his brush and looking for spots of varnish on his purple velvet jacket.

"Well!" said Kent, in the non-committal tone that always exasperated his friend.

"Damnable, I suppose?"

"No," replied Kent: "fair."

Kent never drawled; he spoke with singular clearness and precision; but there was a deliberation in his pauses and a certain cold evenness in his enunciation which made people think that he drawled. He spoke little, but his speech went a great way.

Jack Carnegie sometimes drawled and sometimes rattled. He rattled now.

"Chiar'oscuro all wrong — light bad — drawing defective, eh? I'm no painter, am I?"

"No," Kent said placidly; "but you're not half a bad critic."

Carnegie changed his tactics.

"Seriously, Cecil, how is it?"

Kent's cold voice suddenly became frank and hearty, as he replied, —

"It is a good piece of work, old fellow."

He clapped an approving palm on his friend's shoulder. Carnegie's handsome young face beamed with delight. He stroked his moustache and ran his hand through his curly hair. He was proud of Cecil Kent's good opinion; and he had reason to be. But he felt that, although he was pleased, he must not forget to be cynical; for he was quite an accomplished cynic.

There was an undertone of grateful complacency in his voice; but he only said, —

"Lear is a good subject for a fellow who is strong on beards — beards and character, and that sort of thing. But what a precious old ass he was, to treat that nice girl in that absurd style! Do you know, I've got more or less of an idea, since I've been studying him up, that Lear was an old fraud?"

Kent laughed.

"If you look at him from a realistic standpoint, perhaps he *is* rather an absurdity — trotting around the country and conversing with thunderstorms."

"I'm speaking seriously, though. I don't quite see the grandeur in his character."

"Well, he certainly might have talked less and done more. But I say, Jack, where did you get your Cordelia? That's no model. Face seems familiar to me, too."

"No," replied Carnegie, fumbling for nothing in his color-box; "she was a — a sort of — er — inspiration."

Kent looked long and hard at the sweet face on the canvas. Carnegie had painted a new Cordelia. It was not the regulation blonde woman, with a great deal of hair and no glimmer of expression. This girl had dusky hair drawn close about her fine head, and the brown eyes looked up from the dying man's face as though they had gazed until another glance would bring tears, and in them was something more than a child's love or a woman's tender-

ness; there was the light of the courage that bears, and the devotion that sacrifices self.

Poor Jack Carnegie was no great painter, and his friend knew it. He would have been a great painter had he conceived that face. He understood his business, though, and Kent could have sworn, as he looked, that the artist had merely put on canvas something that was set before him. Perhaps he did not even know how well he had done that; or, knowing so much, did not know how much it was to do.

Kent knew also what woman's face Carnegie had copied. He had the technical knowledge to see through the artist's flimsy efforts at disguise. Indeed, there is nothing unusual in a man's choosing his model from among his friends. What more natural than that a young lady should sit to Mr. John Carnegie, or lend him her photograph, in the cause of art? Nor was it strange that Mr. John Carnegie, being an artist, and therefore vain, should hesitate to acknowledge his obligations to nature. It was not consideration of these points that brought the look of perplexity to Kent's hard features. This face in the picture was for any one's painting; but where and when had the face thus revealed the woman's soul to John Carnegie? Kent frowned as he turned away from the easel.

"Have you been making any calls lately?"

There had been a pause; but somehow this question seemed to spring out of the query Kent had put before. Carnegie evidently felt this, for he answered

with an affectation of formality that was more snappish than jocose, —

"I don't go into 'society,' Mr. Kent."

"The fact," said Kent quietly, "is self-evident, *Mr.* Carnegie."

When Kent chose to be sarcastic or cynical, Carnegie felt himself a mere amateur at the business. He now leaped from cynicism to extravagance.

"You mean that I'm a boor," he said, marching excitedly up and down the room, while Kent, seated in an easy-chair, followed him with calm eyes. "Well, I'd rather be a boor than a humbug. See here, Kent, you know the hollowness and worthlessness of this 'society' just as well as I do. You don't believe that this world is all sweetness and light, any more than I do. You are just as much of a sceptic as I am."

"I am. Why not?"

Kent always treated these misanthropic outbursts of his friend with a chilly yet amused contempt.

"Why not? Because you bow down to the god of 'society,' knowing him to be a miserable old fetich. You see all the nonsense of conventionality, and yet you're always ready to go in for it."

"I am. Why not?" Then Kent rose, and spoke with more warmth, while he slowly walked to the picture on the easel and looked at it once more with unsatisfied eyes. "If I doubt all the world, why make an exception in my own case as the one genuine individual in a universe of shams? Besides, I'm not cut out for a picturesque cynic. If I were a

romantic Apollo, with a poetic eye and classic features, I should have my little love affair, retire from the world, and pose as an interesting hermit with a blighted heart and a purple velvet jacket."

Carnegie moved uneasily.

"Oh, I dare say you've forgotten the love affair," Kent went on, "and replaced the heart by this time."

Carnegie did not answer. He affected to be busy in arranging the contents of a huge antique chest of drawers, and he made much rattling among ivory chessmen and little clay lamps and old paperweights and other trifles. Kent said no more; but lit a cigarette and smoked peacefully, staring at Cordelia on the canvas.

This had for a long time been a sore point between the two friends, this question of their widely differing attitude to what Jack Carnegie sometimes pronounced with a slangy irreverence, "sassiety." Yet each man looked at the institution after his own natural way, and it would have been fairly impossible to bring them together by any force of argument or gentle persuasion. Their positions in life were absolutely opposed to each other. Jack Carnegie was a plutocrat in distress. Cecil Kent was a Bohemian in good luck.

This is speaking broadly. Jack Carnegie's distress was for hundreds of thousands of dollars; Cecil Kent's luck was to be measured by tens of thousands. Both were of nearly the same class; aristocrats, so far as Americans can trouble them-

selves to belong to any special class. They both had grandfathers, local habitations and names of some value when they were born. But Cecil Kent, when no more than a boy, had to forget his grandfather, change his home, and make a name for himself in a small new world where money is good only for what it will buy, and where birth does nothing whatever for a man, save to give him breath.

In that hard school he had prospered, after a fashion, and, at the end of fifteen years of hard work, he had shown that he could make a decent living, and earn the respect of his fellow-craftsmen, when a series of deaths set in in the old Kent family, and his grandfather's estate came back to Cecil Charles Van Wart Kent, and he found himself in possession of the old Kent homestead, up the Hudson, and the old Kent acres, many and well-farmed, and the revenues therefrom accruing and to accrue. He was not, perhaps, a rich man; but he was a man well off in a most substantial way, and he had much more money than he cared to spend.

For the change in his fortunes made little change in his way of life. He gave up editorial writing on his newspaper, ceased to work at night, thereby getting a little color into his sallow cheeks, and dropped into the place of the "man who did the art," when that man went West to "run" a mining paper in Denver. In his new position he found room for the ambition half-stifled by years of pot-boiling drudgery. He showed himself more than a man who could "do" such art-writing as must be

done in New York; he was an art-critic, who suddenly became a most important man in his employers' eyes when they found him a valued contributor to the great magazines, and a correspondent of the foreign art journals. But, for the rest, he was the same quiet, steady, plodding professional newspaper man who had earned his forty or fifty dollars a week in the city room or the editorial department for ten years and more.

This was Kent's professional life, which he kept very much to himself, rightly considering that he alone was deeply interested in it. His social life had always been the same, excepting in the days when he had not money enough to buy a dress-coat, or, if the dress-coat were once bought, to keep it out of passive employment as a collateral security for forced loans. In those days he wore a sack-coat, and left his work only to drink beer in the queer boarding-houses or shabby "furnished rooms" where his good friends and co-laborers lived. When he could do better, he divided his leisure fairly between these good friends and those less sincere acquaintances who asked him to their houses because he was "a Kent," and because they dealt socially with the other Kents who could brave it out with purple and fine linen, and solid silver and dusty wine-cellar bins.

He did not flatter those people; he did not seek them out; he only went where he was asked, and made himself agreeable in his negative and taciturn way. If they had questioned him where his heart

was, he would have told them that the poor beer drunk with clever and warm-hearted men and women was sweeter to his taste than all the old family sherry that was ever set on solid mahogany for rich noodles to wax garrulous over. But society never put this question to him; never suspecting that this world contained anything better than it had to offer the poor fellow who was entertained because his grandfather had entertained others.

And if, in his own dear Bohemia, they asked Kent why he bothered himself with dinners and parties and receptions, he told them that he did it "to keep his hair short;" and the subtle significance of his answer was well understood.

Altogether, Cecil Kent was a queer character, and nobody quite understood him. Whereas Jack Carnegie was a simpler study.

He was born rich, and he had lived extravagantly and happily until, in the same year, he lost his lady-love and his fortune. His lady-love took a fancy to another man, and his father speculated in stocks, lost his own money, and blew out his brains rather than touch the money he held in trust; an act of self-denial for which the world gave his memory no credit whatever.

These things — and, it is only fair to say, the last most of all — made Jack Carnegie a cynic. He also became a professional artist. He had been an amateur daubster of great fame, and when he found himself lovelorn and moneyless, he set him down to work to learn his art in an honest fashion, and

succeeded as he deserved. In five years he had made himself well known as a "rising young artist;" he was a popular painter, and he made money. He lost no time in showing society that he scorned it, lest it might steal a march on him and scorn him; and society, being scorned, at once became subservient and obsequious, and rushed to his handsome studio, and bought his pictures. This enabled him to make the studio more handsome, and to set a higher price on the pictures, and to indulge more freely than ever in lofty sarcasm; and, in short, he had a very good time of it, for a man to whom Fate had been unkind.

But he never quite got over the fact that Cecil Kent, his best friend, his chum, his side-partner, refused to take his own picturesquely gloomy view of life, and insisted upon wearing the patent-leather shoes of conventionality on his way through the world.

Kent usually listened to Jack's extravagant deliverances with great patience and good-nature; but occasionally, as in this instance, he hit back with a few amiably sarcastic remarks said in a bitter way.

The silence in the great room was broken by a faint knock at the door.

"What's that?" inquired Kent, for Carnegie was still arranging statuettes and brass candlesticks on his shelves, and putting bits of pottery in new positions, unheeding the noise at his portal.

"Oh," he answered carelessly, "it's only some premature nuisance, too early for the reception. Don't let it in."

"Reception! Is there a reception here to-day?"

"Of course. It's the regular day! Didn't you know that we have Fridays in this building?"

"I have a dim remembrance of fighting crowds here last year. Perhaps I'd better retreat before the irruption of Goths and Vandals. Do you expect any one in particular?"

"No-o-o," drawled Jack, in a somewhat constrained manner: "Bob Swift, of course."

"That goes without saying," Kent laughed: "he's in the wake of every petticoat except his wife's."

Bob Swift's wife was the young woman who had jilted Carnegie five years before. But, as Kent had said, the lost heart had been replaced once or twice since then; and the love affair was so thoroughly forgotten that Carnegie was neither glad nor sorry, but simply indifferent, when he saw the girl who had thrown him over learning in lonely bitterness of heart to repent the folly of marrying a man who made it the object of his life to cut other men out.

"I wish Swift wouldn't select my studio for his flirtation-ground," observed the artist carelessly: "but I'll bet he'll be on hand with the most conspicuous girl he can find in the city of New York. Then, of course, we'll have old Krauss, to tell me that a 'shendleman frient' of his wants to buy a 'leedle bickshur,' and he had thought of 'dot leedle drifle' of mine. And Mrs. Smith promised to look in —"

Kent gave something like a groan. Mrs. Smith

was a rich, young and showy widow, who did not like the name her husband had left her — in the first place, because it seemed incongruous with the ruling passion of her life, which she always declared was the love of plot, mystery and intrigue, and in the second place, because she preferred the name of Kent.

"Yes, Mrs. Smith," Carnegie went on, "and the Belchers, and the Reynoldses, and the McGilligaskie girls, and — oh, yes — Miss Ruthven."

His voice had dropped throughout his speech, which ended in an unnaturally careless and scarcely audible drawl.

But Kent heard what he said.

"Oh," he repeated dryly, "Miss Ruthven."

"Ya-as," assented Jack from the depths of a huge cabinet; "well, good-by, old fellow!"

"Eh?" inquired Kent, who had sat down again.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," and Carnegie turned from the cabinet; "I thought you were going."

Kent was again staring at the picture.

"That's a fine Cordelia," he said, and looked hard at his friend.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISTURBING ELEMENT.

CARNEGIE made no response. There are moments of constraint between friends the awkwardness of which increases in direct ratio to the warmth of the friendship. Here was a suspicion of secrecy, of unavowed purposes, between these two men. Had they been mere acquaintances it would have been of no moment whatever. There was nothing tangible in the way of a grievance; it was only the fact that such a suspicion was an abnormal thing in their relations that made every trifle big with possibilities of serious trouble.

There was nothing for Carnegie to do but to repress a slight feeling of annoyance, and to turn the subject as delicately as he might. Fortunately, both men had plenty of tact; and that valuable possession had not rusted since they had been in Bohemia.

"How do you like the detail of the thing?" he asked; "just observe the way I get my Fool in the shadow there, for a sort of a — a — subdued element in the picture."

"It's a good idea."

"And I tried to make something of the Fool, too — although he is so subordinate. Character in that face, eh?"

"Lots. Whose character?"

Carnegie smiled.

"Why, Cadougan Megilp's, of course."

"What, that queer model of yours? Have you engaged him permanently?"

"I have. He is now my model, and valet, and handy man in general."

"By the way, where did he get that name of his? Did he 'absorb' it, like the rest of his art?"

"No, his name was McGowan; but he never liked it, and one night when old Rogers — he's the man who goes in for stained-glass saints — old Rogers came home one night in a fine state of old mellow mediæval intoxication, and broke a bottle of beer over his head, just as you might across the bow of a ship, and christened him Megilp, and he clung to the name, and it has clung to him."

This formal conversation was growing wearisome. Kent sought a diversion.

"Where is he? Trot him out, can't you, Jack, and show him up before the people come?"

"Certainly," replied his friend; and called, "Megilp! Megilp!"

There was no answer.

"I'm sure the beggar's up there in the gallery. He sleeps there, and he sleeps most of the time.— Megilp!"

There was no sound from the gallery. Carnegie looked puzzled, and then his face cleared.

"Oh, he's the Fool at present. He doesn't recognize his own identity when he is in the service of art. — Hither, sweet Fool!"

They heard high above them the creaking of a truckle-bed, a loud masculine yawn, and then a tall thin man appeared at the head of the staircase and looked down at them.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, but his legs were clad, not in trousers, but in the parti-colored trunks and hose of the Fool.

"He'll keep that trash on," muttered Carnegie, "until I make him take it off."

Megilp came slowly down the stairs, looking half-awake.

"Megilp!" said his master, sharply.

"Nuncle!" returned the conscientious impersonator of the Fool; and then he remembered himself, and added, "Sir?"

"Megilp, I think you have played the Fool long enough. Art is an absorbing mistress; but she sometimes absorbs too much of your important personality. Now, if you can remember who you are, you will oblige me by putting this room to rights before the people come; and then you will return to the garments of civilization, and appear clothed and in your right mind."

"Yes, nuncle — sir!" said the obedient Megilp.

Then he found a feather-duster, and set about brushing the powdery deposit from such articles as his profane hands were permitted to touch. Kent began to "interview" him in journalistic fashion.

"Mr. Carnegie has just completed a very fine picture, Megilp."

"I think we have made a success, sir," replied Megilp, dusting busily; "I think, indeed, that we have surpassed ourself. When I first began to get into the Fool, sir, to absorb him as it were, I had my doubts about the success of the impersonation. But it took, sir, it took. In the language of a kindred art, I became inoculated with the Fool."

"I suppose your collaboration counts for a great deal in the success of Mr. Carnegie's pictures, doesn't it?"

"That's not for me to say, sir," was the modest reply; "but I may safely say that I am thus far important; the picture ain't no good without me."

"Now, Kent," Carnegie interposed, "you've set that fellow off, and there'll be no stopping him."

Megilp turned a look of wounded pride on the speaker.

"As I remarked before, sir, it is not for me to say; but—" and he dropped his voice to a confidential tone and addressed Kent: "I leave it to you, sir, which has the reel art onto his shoulders — me, who have to get up the character all solid and lifelike, or him, who has just to paint what I give him."

"We'll admit that the credit belongs to you, Mr. Megilp. And of course you have had a good deal of experience in this line?"

"My experience as a model, sir, ranges away over twenty years. I have sot for Huntington, sir, and Weir, and Lootz, and all them old-timers. But

they hadn't raised the model business to the dignity of an art. That's come up of late years entirely. That was done by the German school — them beery, palette-knife, bitumen-sloshers from Munich. They daub, mebbe, but they're big artists."

"You must be a walking compendium of American art, Mr. Megilp."

"Mr. Kent," said the queer man, solemnly pausing in his work and crossing his gaudily attired legs as he leaned against a table and spoke with impressively uplifted forefinger, "I have stood and sot, sir, stood and sot for American art from the 'Irish Emigrant' to 'Judas Iscariot.' You remember our 'Irish Emigrant'" — and with a wave of his hand he included Mr. Carnegie in the partnership — "in the Academy of '72 —'I'm sittin' on the stoile, Mary!'"

Here he paused to throw his leg over a chair, dropping into a posture that suggested a man seated on a stile. There was actually a faint touch of Irish brogue in his voice as he said proudly, —

"It was a fine piece of work — knee-breeches and ribbed stockings, with a plush waistcoat, and a pipe stuck in my hat — a felt hat. That picture was an eight-hundred-dollarer, and it was only twelve-by-nine."

"I saw it," said Kent.

"Oh, but you didn't see my 'Judas Iscariot,'" the model went on, waxing enthusiastic; "they wasted that on some scratch exhibition out in Cincinnati. I could show you 'Judas Iscariot' now if I had the beard — and the remorse. Remorse ain't

to be worked up on short notice. It requires concentration."

The man's quaint chatter had put the two friends at their ease. Carnegie laughed outright when Kent gravely asked, —

"If I may be allowed to pry into the hallowed secrets of your art, Mr. Megilp, what do you regard as your masterpiece?"

Megilp never dreamed that any one was making fun of him. He bent a serious brow on the consideration of this question.

"Well, sir," he said at last, dubiously, "I once throwed myself on a 'Bohemian Beggar;' but most connysoors give the pam to my 'Bedouin Chief' — there is more action into it. 'Tis false, 'tis false, my Arab steed; I fling them back their go-hold!'" and with an expression of unspeakable scorn on his face, Mr. Megilp flung away an imaginary purse and grasped the crupper of an imaginary mount.

Even Kent's grave features relaxed. Megilp came to himself. He looked a trifle hurt and annoyed, but he had the air of a man who has long been accustomed to receiving ridicule with the calm and dignified contempt of unperturbed self-confidence; and perhaps he forbore to express his sense of wrong, from a knowledge that it might spoil a rare chance to talk. Next to his art, Megilp prided himself upon his conversation.

"In my softer moments," he went on, with a pleasant melancholy in his tone, "I have even done a little in the feminine line. I have posed for a 'Gitana.' My 'Gitana' was a reminiscence."

"She was a fluke, you mean," put in Carnegie.

"She was a reminiscence," repeated Megilp; "in my early youth I was attached to a Gitana. She was attached to an *I*-talian. He was attached to a hand-organ. I disputed her affections with the minstrel. Hence the present want of balance about my nose"— and he pointed to a slight deflection in the true line of that organ. "He was the only *I*-talian I ever knew who could box. He boxed with his foot."

Megilp sighed over the memory; and Carnegie advanced and stopped any further exhibition of his peculiarities.

"Look here! I shall want you to get all these 'Lear' traps out of the way. I am going to begin something new to-morrow. Oh, it's a beastly thing," Carnegie continued, in explanation to Kent; "a commission from Chicago. By Jove, Cecil, they want me to paint an 'Assassination of Julius Cæsar'— I swear they do. If it ever gets back to New York it will ruin me; but it's got to be done. Chicago taste I don't admire, but Chicago shekels speak eloquently; and I'm going in for Julius Cæsar to-morrow morning."

"Am I to absorb Cæsar, sir?" inquired Megilp.

"I shall want you for the slaughter."

"I hope," ventured Kent, "that you will absorb to your own satisfaction — and Cæsar's."

Megilp retired slowly and grandly to his gallery, after Carnegie had given him a great brown paper parcel of Roman robes, hired from the nearest costumer.

When he was gone there was once more an awkward pause. Both Kent and Carnegie felt that there was need of an explanation, a clearing-up between them — a need all the more pressing that it could not well be defined. In another moment, perhaps, one or the other would have spoken, had not a knock been heard at the door — a knock, this time, that had an assured force about it that spoke of a well-accredited visitor.

"Come in!" Carnegie shouted.

The door opened, and Cordelia stood on the threshold.

"Mr. Ruthven —" said Carnegie.

"Miss Ruthven —" said Kent.

"We're early, but I felt — ah — sure you'd admit us," remarked Mr. Ruthven, tripping in after his daughter, and looking the most faultless middle-aged gentleman who ever honored art with his patronage. His dress was neat with a beautiful masculine neatness; his thin gray whiskers were even and smoothly combed; there was a refined repose upon his delicate features; from his perfectly fitting gaiters to his perfectly parted hair, there was no spot or space amiss on him. If it had been Mr. Ruthven's whole aim and object in life to disarm all possible criticism of his personal appearance, he could not have made a better effect in his externals than he did make. And everybody knew that he kept the inside of the cup and platter correspondingly clean. They were empty perhaps, but that was quite another matter. So long as the literal injunc-

tion is obeyed, why should society trouble itself about spiritual responsibilities? Mr. Ruthven was rich; Mr. Ruthven was well-born; Mr. Ruthven was a great patron of art. If any one said that Mr. Ruthven's wife had died of a heart broken by his polite neglect — why, society shrugged its charitable shoulders, and wondered how people could disseminate scandal in that cruel and wholly unnecessary way.

"Yes," repeated Mr. Ruthven — he had a trick of repeating his sentences; "we felt sure you'd admit us."

"Of course he would with pleasure!" said Faith Ruthven, in her clear, sweet voice. She looked across at Carnegie as she spoke, though she met Kent, advancing to her, and shook hands with him.

Kent saw the look, which told nothing. Ruthven came up to him with his "Ah, Mr. Kent!" — a form of address which he always used, and which, as he used it, expressed a pleased and patronizing surprise, not unpleasant to the person thus greeted, yet which carried an implication of superiority difficult to define. When Mr. Ruthven said, "Ah, Mr. Jones!" Mr. Jones understood that Mr. Ruthven considered him a most promising young man, and was a little startled to find that he had been able to exist in a vulgar and unsympathetic world since his last meeting with the appreciative Mr. Ruthven.

"Let us see what Mr. Carnegie has been doing," said Mr. Ruthven; and they stepped over to the picture on the easel.

Carnegie was talking with Faith, but the others could not hear them. This was because they spoke in low tones, and did not wish to be heard.

"Wouldn't you, Jack?" asked Faith, half coyly, continuing her previous speech.

"My dear little girl," was all Carnegie's answer.

Then they moved aside, and sat down by a table in the shadow of the gallery.

Kent stood with Ruthven before the picture, and watched Faith's father stroke his "educated whisker," and smile his "watery smile," and comment with learned condescension on the artist's work.

"Why, why," inquired Mr. Ruthven, "does our excellent young friend paint such — er — distressing subject? So harrowing! *Why* will he look at the gloomy side of life? Now I've just come from Wycherly-Cobbington's studio — you know him — nephew of the banker. He showed me a picture he has just sold for two thousand dollars. Charming — charming!"

Mr. Ruthven gently accentuated his words with a wave of his gold eye-glasses.

"Thirteen little chickens — er — newly arrived little chickens — Wycherly-Cobbington *always* paints chickens — all looking up with their — er — innocent little mouths open, trusting to a beneficent Providence for their worm!"

"One worm for the whole thirteen?"

Mr. Ruthven smiled in magnanimous pity for a darkened mind.

"Ah, my dear young cynical friend," he said, "nature provides a worm for *every* little chicken's mouth."

"Yes," returned Kent, in his driest way; "I've noticed her remarkable kindness and liberality in that way. How do you suppose the worms like it?"

Mr. Ruthven waved the suggestion aside with his gold eye-glasses.

"I'm not looking at it from the standpoint of the worms. Excuse me, Mr. Kent, but — er — I cannot regard nature through your eyes of infidel doubt — pardon the phrase. I'm sorry I mentioned the little chickens. I suppose your feelings toward poor Wycherly-Cobbington are hard — very hard?"

"Not at all. My dear sir, if a man can get through this life, and find nothing better to do than to paint chickens, it is proof positive that it is all he is good for."

Mr. Ruthven cast up his gray eyes in polite horror.

"Oh, you young men of the present day! Miserable creatures — excuse me — without trust or hope! You see the canker-spot in every rose — ah! You have no confidence in human nature — positively no confidence whatever. Sad, sad, sad!"

Mr. Ruthven's repetitions were, to those who knew him well, evidence of divided attention. Kent looked at the elder man, and saw that he had

fixed an uneasy glance on Carnegie and Faith, sitting in the shade and talking earnestly.

This is what they were saying:

Faith spoke to her lover:

"Jack, there must be an end to this concealment. I do not like it."

Carnegie answered her, —

"No more do I, my love. But what are we to do with the benevolent paternal?"

Faith's eyes dropped as she replied, with more doubt in her voice than her words expressed, —

"Papa loves me so dearly that I'm sure he'll yield."

Carnegie's objection was prompt:

"But papa doesn't love *me* — well, not extravagantly. And I anticipate more or less difficulty in capturing the parental blessing."

They were speaking a little louder than before. The two men at the easel could not hear their words, but there was a pause while Ruthven pretended to look at the picture and Kent pretended to look at nothing in particular. Neither was listening, neither would have listened under any circumstances; yet each wondered, guessed and feared what was being talked over a half-dozen yards away.

"No," Ruthven went on at last, "I never could feel any sympathy with the character of *Lear*. It has a vein of cynical philosophy, bordering even on scepticism, that *pains* me. And, then, he brought all his troubles upon himself by his want of confidence in his daughter. Cordelia, you know. He

did not trust her. — Faith, my love!" he broke out nervously, "you're not looking at Mr. Carnegie's picture."

"No, papa," Faith answered quietly; but she did not move from her seat.

Her father frowned slightly, turned again to the impassive Kent, and went on didactically:

"Blind indeed must have been the — er — individual who could fail to appreciate the beauty and purity and — er — truth —" Mr. Ruthven wanted a polysyllable and could not find one — "of Cordelia's character. Where did your friend get such a commonplace model for his Cordelia? She — er — quite mars the picture. No character in that face. Excuse me, Mr. Carnegie, but I think there is somebody at the door. Faith dear, you mustn't monopolize Mr. Carnegie."

"May I not?" asked Faith, smiling.

"Yes, you may, my angel!" whispered Carnegie; and then he leaped up and went to the door.

Two extremely pretty women stood outside, waiting for admission. One was fair and one was dark.

"We didn't knock," said Mrs. Smith, the fair one; "we meant to surprise you with an awfully mysterious entrance."

"Is there room here for two poor lone widows?" asked the dark one, with a nervous, unpleasant laugh.

"*Two*, Mrs. Swift?" Mr. Ruthven inquired, courteous but somewhat shocked.

"What do you call me?" Adelaide Swift de-

manded, with a bitterness that no assumption of reckless humor could hide.

"I trust my charming friend Mr. Swift has not departed this life?"

"I don't know, Mr. Ruthven,' answered the newcomer as she kissed Faith and sat down in Carnegie's chair; "I see so little of him."

"She's going to make one of her infernal scenes," Carnegie muttered in Kent's ear.

CHAPTER III.

AN INITIAL INDISCRETION.

FAITH rose and stood behind her friend's chair, and leaned over to whisper to her.

"Adelaide dear, don't talk in that way. Think how horrible it would be if you really were a — a widow!"

Mrs. Smith assailed Ruthven at once. If she had no chance to flirt with Kent, she could at least ride her little hobby.

"*I* can't see," she said, "what Adelaide has to complain of. She has a most *interesting* husband. Perhaps he isn't exactly devoted; but then you can't have everything; and he certainly does give her something to think about. If he were *my* husband, I should have *such* fun circumventing him. It's a dramatic excitement, you know, and I do love that sort of thing, if my name *is* Smith. Indeed, Mr. Ruthven, after my dreadfully commonplace married life, I should really like a husband who would put a little pepper into the matrimonial porridge."

"Then I should say," remarked Ruthven calmly, while his features expressed a mild annoyance at

the frank and cheerful indelicacy of this speech, "it's a thousand pities you hadn't married Bob Swift. Ah — talk of the — er — Mephisto —"

For the door had opened, and a young man appeared; a well dressed and rather handsome young man. He was not very young; in fact, at the second glance, one felt inclined to withdraw the adjective. There was a certain thinness of the hair, quite noticeable as he stood with his hat off, blinking in the dim light of the studio; a certain fulness under his round chin, and a generosity of girth below, that made it clear that Bob Swift had not long to flirt before the time when he would have to hang up his conquering arms on the "left wall" of Venus's temple.

"I say, Carnegie," the new-comer cried, peering about for his friend — Swift was a little near-sighted, though he never owned up to it — "I say, Carnegie — I beg your pardon, Mrs. Smith — Mr. Ruthven — I didn't see you. Why, I thought Miss Faith was to be here? Carnegie, I've got the McGilligaskie girls in tow — shall I bring them in here?"

"Yes, do!" said Mrs. Swift in painfully distinct tones. She was so thoroughly blotted out, as she sat by the table at the foot of the gallery drapery, the deep shadow falling upon her dark dress, that her husband, looking in from the glaring light of the corridor, had not seen her.

Now, as he advanced toward her in a slightly embarrassed manner, he saw her eyes flashing a threatening light. There was a most unpleasant

suggestion of impending conflict in the atmosphere of the studio. Everybody present knew the relations between husband and wife; some of them had been present at scenes of the sort before. Uncomfortable and self-conscious, they all found sudden attractions in the parts of the room furthest from the table below the gallery, and idled off, with labored carelessness, to gaze at things in which they took no manner of interest. Mrs. Smith captured Kent and took him to look at a collection of small Chinese gods. Carnegie searched noiselessly among a lot of old canvases in a corner, and tried to act as though his artistic future depended upon his finding a certain sketch. Mr. Ruthven, who was the prince of pure bric-à-brac collectors, and who knew every piece in Carnegie's little stock, handled, with a wondrous affectation of interest, a few odd pieces of old Venetian glass.

Faith only, disdaining the expedients of conventional tact, stood calmly by Adelaide Swift's chair, like an angel of peace whose presence should silence rage and recrimination. Poor little angel! Frivolity and jealousy heed not your uplifted hand; your sweet purity is only a galling reproach to them, and if between them they can fray your white wings and make your heart bleed, and send you back whence you came, with earthly stain upon your white robes, be assured they will.

Adelaide's eyes were fixed on her husband's face, and she saw nothing else. Swift, looking at the two women, noted only that his wife's clothes were

of glinting garnet silk, and velvet of some deeper red that was almost black, and that Faith stood by her in a dress that was of the color of wood-violets; with violets in her belt and a white rose at her breast. Bob Swift had an eye for women's dress; and he thought the combination novel and rather pleasing, especially against a good background. This was all he was thinking of. He had enough experience of his wife's ways to know that there was no use in laying out a defence before she developed her plan of attack.

"You here?" he inquired, with the weakest possible attempt to look indifferent and surprised. It was a mere piece of perfunctory courtesy on his part. He knew what was coming; but he felt it his duty to be amiable and polite as long as possible.

"No," said Adelaide in a voice steady and low, but uncompromisingly clear; "I am in the house, of course, in my room, waiting with my hands folded for you to tow the McGilligaskie girls into port and come home."

"But," Robert answered, blandly, "my dear, I'm sure I didn't know you intended — "

"Of course not," Adelaide caught him up. "What do you know of my movements? Although you could easily make sure that Faith would be here?"

"Oh, as to that," explained Robert in the aggrieved tone of injured innocence, "I happened to call on Miss Ruthven yesterday, and she told me she was coming."

Adelaide repeated his words with intense contempt:

"Oh, you happened to call on Miss Ruthven yesterday, and she told you she was coming!" And she arose and swept grandly off to join Kent and Mrs. Smith.

"Delightful, this sort of thing," muttered Robert, and turned to Faith, who still stood beside the empty chair, a look of keen pain on her face.

At the same moment, Carnegie left his dusty canvases and moved toward his betrothed. Mr. Ruthven suddenly replaced a long-necked vase on its shelf, with a haste that nearly caused its breakage, and was at his daughter's side in a moment.

"Carnegie," he began, before either of the young men could speak, "I want you to come with me to Wycherly-Cobbington's studio; I wish to show Mrs. Smith those chickens of his, and I should like to have your opinion at the same time. I — er — think of purchasing the picture for my dining-room."

Carnegie assented with a bad grace. Mrs. Smith, on being invited to inspect the chickens, expressed her entire readiness to go anywhere or do anything.

"It is no use asking Mr. Kent, I suppose," said Mr. Ruthven in a tone that contained no suggestion of invitation.

"I'll stay here," said Adelaide, sitting down before the easel.

"Faith dear, you'll come with us, won't you?" Mrs. Smith called across the room.

"Faith has just seen the chickens," interposed Ruthven nervously.

"No," Faith answered for herself, "I will wait for you. And," she continued, smiling, "I've something to say to Mr. Swift."

The three went toward the door. Faith sat in Adelaide's chair, and Swift dropped into the seat opposite her. Faith clasped her gloved hands, rested them on the table, and faced the complacent person on the other side, who stroked his moustache and smiled. A bright blush tinged her face for a second. She was thoroughly in earnest, and her innocent enthusiasm blinded her to the awkwardness of the position in which she was about to place herself. It was a girl's foolish scheme that she had in her head, and she was about to carry it out with a woman's heart. She wished to bring man and wife together once more. Poor Faith Ruthven! You were not the first who has had that benevolent fancy; the secret history of any social circle might have warned you of such folly with a dozen instances of martyred meddlers. That matrimonial tie once loosened, who shall draw it tight again without entangling his own pragmatical fingers?

"Yes," Faith would have said to such showing, "but I am doing no wrong, and I can come to no harm. And she is my near and dear friend, whom I have known from childhood; and she is breaking her heart for her husband; and I am sure he loves her — he must love her — and I will help them."

But before she could speak, Swift had leapt up to

catch Carnegie on the door-sill, and whisper to him, —

"Jack, I left those girls in Wycherly-Cobbington's — just keep them out of this for five minutes, will you?"

Then he returned and sat him down again.

This small diversion might have discouraged a less determined woman than Faith Ruthven; but the young enthusiast had made up her mind that Mr. Robert Swift was a brand to be plucked from the burning of frivolity, and she plunged into her timid little appeal, quite unconscious of the two facts that Mr. Swift's mind was not on his own misdeeds, and that the eyes of Mr. Swift's wife were on Mr. Swift — unconscious wholly of this last, or a glance might have shown her the way of wisdom and silence. For Adelaide Swift, though she made some pretence of talking with her companion, turned every second to dart glances of jealousy and love and wounded pride at her husband, who bent his vain and handsome head to hear whatever a pretty young girl might have to say to him.

"You may not think," said Faith with a little tremor in her voice, "you may not think it proper in me to speak to you about — about — such things; but, Mr. Swift, how *can* I be silent when I see something that really pains me? Perhaps I am the only one of all your friends — you won't think that I am saying more than I have a right to? — the only one of your friends who has been able to see that you have a true and loyal heart — I'm sure you have!"

There was a pathetic simplicity in the girl's tone that Swift could not but catch. He did not try to guess at its meaning; he did not think enough about it to misconstrue its object; he simply took his cue from it, and dropped into a touching little lamentation over the way a cruel world misunderstood him, and explained, with mournful sadness in his manly voice, that he was not a heartless butterfly of fashion, but a true-souled martyr to a popular misconception. Faith heard him through with eyes at first glad and hopeful, that took on a disappointed look as the man ran glibly on with words that had no heart in them.

Meanwhile, Adelaide stole glances at them, and answered Kent at random, until his sudden silence brought her to her senses. She looked around quickly, and met Kent's eyes, quiet and quizzical.

"I suppose you think," she burst out, "that it's disgraceful for me to go on in this way; but why should I try to disguise what everybody is laughing at? There are some women who could do it; but I'm not that kind, you know, Mr. Kent. You have had a chance to know that I am not the only woman that has cried out against that man's cruel infidelity. That much I'm sure of."

Kent smiled. He could have told Mrs. Swift much that she was *not* sure of, but he did not; for he knew that Bob Swift was much more of a fool than a knave. He was a man constitutionally cursed with that feeblest and most fatal kind of vanity that is not allied to self-conceit. Swift's

vanity was not a pride in his silky moustache, or his fine form, or his rich baritone voice; it was merely a delicate epicurean selfishness, that recognized his own individuality as the most fitting thing that the world offered whereto others could make sacrifice. He was proud of his own good luck, of his success, of his own happiness, rather than of the gifts of nature that had procured him his various indulgences. There was nothing consciously mean or cruel about the man; and to other men he had shown himself a good and steadfast friend. The only trouble was that he had never been taught to regard women as anything better than ministers to his own vanity; and that the women themselves had treated him not as a man, but as an idol — or a plaything. And, of course, he had noticed that he was an idol, and it had never occurred to him that it was only a toy bric-à-brac idol at the best.

But Kent knew that he could not explain this to Swift's wife. She had made the mistake of all her sex, and had put her handsome husband on a gilt pedestal and worshipped him. Now, after having cultivated his taste for idolatry to the highest point, she cried because she alone could not satisfy the cravings of an abnormal vanity.

So Kent only smiled. Mrs. Swift went on:

"Why does he leave me to run after the — McGilligaskie girls?"

The poor woman was so earnest in her simple question that her companion roused himself to reply:

"Why does he leave you to run after the McGilligaskie girls? My dear Mrs. Swift, in the economy of nature there are some animals who will leave hay to run after thistles."

Adelaide considered this for a moment, and then made a little bow of acknowledgment. It was very complimentary, and she knew that her friend was extremely clever; but it was not clever compliments that her restless heart sought at that moment. Her eyes wandered back to her husband, and in a second Kent saw her touching with the forefinger of her right hand the outspread fingers of the other.

"What are you counting up?" he asked.

"My rivals," she replied succinctly.

"You have only one."

"*Who?*"

"Yourself."

"What do you mean?" the woman demanded.

"Yourself!" he repeated. "Mrs. Swift, it is a law of nature, as well as of trade, that supply is the death of demand. When a man has got what he wants, he no longer wants what he has got. Your husband wanted the priceless treasure of your affection. Very unfortunately and injudiciously, you gave it to him. As an inevitable consequence, the article lost its commercial value in his eyes. A lover is simply a thirsty man. Let him drink, and he is no longer thirsty. You should have kept your husband dry, that is all."

Almost as he spoke, Faith Ruthven was answering the long, eloquent and carefully formulated

speech with which Mr. Swift had made himself an interesting object of pity to many impressible-minded women. What Faith said was this:

"Mr. Swift, perhaps I ought to be silent. Perhaps I do not know how to say what I have to say. But I cannot believe that a man can be mean enough to despise as a gift what he sought as a prize. Believe me, I speak from my very heart when I plead in behalf of a woman who has given herself up to a man — her life — her love. Remember, she has yielded up every defence. Remember, she can hereafter look to no other hand for help. Remember that, however poor her offering may have been, she gave you all she had, and she is beggared in heart and hope if you cheat her of the love she craves."

And with flushed cheeks, the girl arose and walked rapidly across the room, and put her lips to Adelaide's cheeks with the quick, impulsive caress of their old school-days.

Just as she did so, her father came in with Carnegie.

"What does she mean?" Adelaide Swift asked herself.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD LEAVEN WORKS.

RUTHVEN stopped to whisper to Swift, who had risen from his seat, and was knitting his brows in a vain attempt to grasp the significance of Faith's passionate speech. One obvious suggestion occurred to him, but he had the grace to frown it down.

"Swift, my dear fellow," murmured the elder gentleman in his beautiful bland man-of-the-world way, "I think your presence is required in Wycherly-Cobbington's studio. I left Mrs. Smith there in charge of the McGilligaskie girls. They were inquiring after you very tenderly."

"Confound them!" said Robert. "My dear," he inquired of Adelaide with great politeness, "won't you come and see what's-his-name's hens?"

"Don't let me detain you," was all the reply his wife made. Swift hesitated for a second, and then discreetly and quietly slipped away without further remark. Somebody once offended Bob Swift deeply by remarking that he had many of the qualities which belong naturally to a henpecked husband.

"Mr. Kent," said Mr. Ruthven as Faith and

Carnegie drew together, "I wish you would lend yourself to my daughter for fifteen minutes. I'll join you in Moreland's room — in the northeast wing, you know. I saw old Krauss in Wycherly-Cobbington's, and I want to have a little chat with him on — er — business. Won't you oblige me?"

Kent bowed gravely.

"Of course," explained the old diplomatist, "I can't ask Mr. Carnegie to leave his studio, now that the crowd — the — er — populace is here."

He waited only to see that his daughter had accepted Mr. Kent's escort, and that Carnegie had smoothed out his scowl and gone to do the polite to Mrs. Swift, and then Mr. Ruthven took his refined and aristocratic presence out of the room.

His parting glance showed him that all was as he could wish it. Mrs. Swift had greeted her aforetime lover with a bright smile, and Kent and Faith had begun a conversation of apparently deep interest. Mr. Ruthven looked upon Kent with a friendly eye. He was not, perhaps, actually an "eligible" — no professional man, save a lawyer, could be quite that in Mr. Ruthven's social code; but he was certainly not a "detrimental," and perhaps, in the present state of society, there might be worse *partis* than a gentleman with a good name and a fair property, even if he was a journalist.

But Mr. Ruthven might have been somewhat disturbed in his mind had he heard what was passing between his daughter and Kent.

"Are we going to Mr. Wycherly-Cobbington's?" Faith had asked.

"Not unless you especially yearn for a second course of spring chicken," was Mr. Kent's reply.

"I'm afraid you don't believe in little chickens, Mr. Kent," she said archly, smiling up in his face.

"Oh, yes I do," said Kent, "but I believe in old hens too."

"Old hens?" she repeated, puzzled.

"Yes, old hens. Mrs. Grundy, for instance."

"That means that I have done something indiscreet."

"It means that if my friend Swift must hover about little chickens, I would rather have him choose those that are only painted."

"Mr. Kent," said Miss Ruthven, moving a little away from him, a look of pained surprise in her deep eyes, "what right have you to speak to me in this way?"

"I have *no* right," he responded, with more feeling in his hard voice than she had ever heard before; "yet what can I do but warn you that, between a vain man and a jealous woman, generous innocence is in very bad company?"

Faith looked at him quietly.

"Is this an insult?"

"Miss Ruthven," he said to her gravely, "am I the man to insult a woman? And of all women, *you?*"

"Do you think I am flirting with Mr. Swift?" she insisted.

"I know," he returned scornfully, "that you care no more for that conceited coxcomb than you do for

— for *me*. But he imagines that you do, and therein lies the possibility of — well, of mischief. Well, I had best been silent. You would more readily forgive an impertinence from him than my brutal bluntness."

Faith melted instantly, and held out her little hand to him. There was no misunderstanding Kent when he spoke in that quietly earnest tone. The note of sadness in his voice put his sincerity beyond question. Faith did not know the reason of the sadness; but she knew that it was a true friend who spoke.

"No, Mr. Kent, I understand you, and I — I thank you. Perhaps I have been a little careless of appearances — you know it is my way — I shall never be anything more than a school-girl, I fear. But I had an end in view, and I am *certain* you will approve of it when you know it."

"And when shall I know it?"

"When it is accomplished," answered Faith, in a way that closed the conversation. Then she touched his arm. "Come, take me to Mr. Moreland's."

"To revel in chrome-yellow sunsets on bitumen waters," added Kent; and they stepped out into the corridor.

Carnegie chewed his moustache in helpless wrath as he listened to the chatter of the woman whom he had once loved, and whose society now was merely an annoyance to him. Mr. John Carnegie was very much out of temper. The last hour had passed most dismally for him; Kent had worried him; he

had had no fair opportunity to talk with Faith; Adelaide had brought her domestic miseries into his artistic precincts, and the little scene he had witnessed between his betrothed and Robert Swift had filled him with unholy rage. It would not have annoyed him had it not come on the top of all these petty annoyances. But Jack Carnegie's temper was short at the best, and when he had seen Faith Ruthven bending across the table to talk to Swift, with the color in her cheeks, he felt something of the same gust of passion rising in his breast that had overwhelmed him five years before, and when the same man took from him the woman to whom he was then engaged.

And by some strange and luckless coincidence, just as this ghost of an old-time emotion arose in his mind, Adelaide's manner took on the spirit and warmth of the past, and she talked to him as he had not heard her talk since the first days of that secret and disastrous engagement of theirs.

For Jack was now in his second secret engagement. There was nothing of the ultra-romantic, there was no yearning for the mysterious, about Carnegie; but mere chance had twice placed him in a false position. He was not rich enough to marry Faith Ruthven if she waited for her father's consent. So he paltered with time, and tried to make his art more of a business than he had hitherto held it. Five years before, he had taught Adelaide Swift to hold her tongue about their betrothal, when first he made love to her within the very gates of her board-

ing-school. Afterward she needed no teaching. They had had a most tempestuous time of it; they passed through a year of sobs and tears and quarrels, and desperate threats and remorse, and all the bitterness born of love and folly, and in the end the tragedy suddenly turned into a polite and proper and plotless high comedy; and Adelaide Beckford married Robert Swift, loving him with a love that she had never given to John Carnegie, who was left to reflect that it was he himself who had awakened this capacity for passion in the girl's breast. He suffered only as he deserved; but a knowledge of one's deserts does not make suffering any the more easy; and, not being a man to drown pain in drink, he took to cynicism as a moral narcotic and intoxicant, being further moved to this step by other contemporary causes of dissatisfaction with the world.

Now, as Adelaide spoke, those five years vanished as sleep slips off a man when he wakes and faces the life he laid down the night before. It was not a passion of memory that touched him; it was a mere trick of the senses, such as a man knows who, opening an old trunk, is conscious, through must and dust, of familiar scents, and notes strange little suggestions of dead people and dead times in half-forgotten trifles — in the folding of a garment, in the turning down of a page in a book, in a broken ornament — and the past is made alive again for him, and becomes a ghostly present; the old deeds are done again; he walks the old ways, inspired by the old

hopes, dismayed by the old fears — hopes and fears that have long ceased to encourage or to depress.

Carnegie's love for Adelaide Swift was dead beyond all possibility of revivifying, but the familiar ring of her voice took him back to the season of their romance. He felt his cheek flush again with the mad excitement of those days; he remembered the bitter ending, the crowding sorrows, that had crushed the youth out of his heart; he felt the dull pain of his first days of desolate longing; he heard the clear melodious voice ringing in his ears, and while he listened, a space of five years separated him from the purer and healthier life to which his love for Faith Ruthven had lifted him.

Carnegie's past had brought out only what was weakest in his nature; and this freak of memory merely served to irritate him by bringing him face to face with a record in which he felt no pride. This crowned his hour of discomfort, and woke a small devil of rage within him. Was he always to be the fool of luck and love? Why must this reminiscence of woman's falsehood assail him in the very hour in which Faith's seeming neglect of him and attention to another man had caused him the first pang of distrust he had known since he had found happiness in this new love? Was it a reminder that all women were false? And this sham cynic got, in that moment, a taste of the gall and hyssop of real cynicism.

Yes, it was weak, it was foolish, it was unmanly. But he was very much in love, and he was jealous

and hot-tempered at all times, and he had been sorely tried in several small ways since Kent had knocked at his door that day. He was scarcely quick-witted enough to see that it was her father's diplomacy that had kept Faith out of his way; he thought it was accident, and that inclination had aided accident. Not one of all the things that happened, taken individually, would have disturbed him; but the combination was too much for his equanimity, and before he had made pretence of listening to Adelaide for ten minutes, Jack Carnegie was jealous of Robert Swift, angry with Faith, and generally hopeless of seeing any light upon his pathway to the grave.

Even thus, all might have gone well, had the young man had but a few minutes in which to collect himself. But now the reception was in full blast, and a throng of people began to pour in through the broad doors, and to fill the studio with noisy chatter. There were pretty women in pretty dresses, lazy, imperturbable dandies, a few bewildered children dragged from studio to studio. There were strange people from the country; there were sharp old Jewish picture-dealers; there were lively young men from the newspapers, and confidential, sage old art-gossips from the magazines.

The crowd filled the building and surged in and out of the studios. They fingered the wet paintings, and asked exasperating questions of the artists. They rummaged among the bric-à-brac, and gathered in little knots in the doorways.

Carnegie had his share of the annoyance. When Adelaide found that she could not hold his attention, she went to seek Mrs. Smith, and made her exit with a look that betokened trouble for somebody. Then Carnegie was attacked by a youth despatched from a daily paper to report the reception. Being in a bad humor, he snubbed the youth, and "let himself in," as the young gentleman expressed it, for a bad notice in the "influential daily." Then he had trouble with a female plutocrat who wanted a picture to fill a space ten inches by fourteen-and-a-half, and who spent twenty minutes in vainly trying to induce him to trim his "Lear and Cordelia" down to those dimensions. After her came a gentleman from Chicago, who bought two pictures, the worst in his studio, after measuring them off with a foot-rule and computing the price per square inch. And, of course, the inevitable Krauss came in to make his little bargain. Carnegie greeted him sourly, refused, and rather rudely, a fair offer for the "Lear," and wasted some withering sarcasm on the business methods of his visitor. Krauss retired, deprecatory but uncrushed; and then Carnegie could have bitten off his own tongue for his hasty speech. What business had he to throw away an opportunity of making money, now that he needed every cent that his art could win him? This brought another and an uglier thought to his mind. Did he need it, after all — was a woman making a fool of him for the second time in his life?

A foolish and wicked thought; but it came across

his excited mind, and did its work. For in that very moment Faith Ruthven slipped under the portière and entered the studio. She had escaped her father's vigilance, and had waited until for one moment the room was empty. Then she came in and drew the door to after her, as though by accident, well knowing — the innocent schemer! — that this was the artist's manner of notifying the public that no visitors would be received. It was a very trifling ruse, of course, but it would give them the few moments they wanted, she thought. It gave them more.

She came softly up to him, after a glance around the room, and touched his arm. He was standing in front of his picture staring hard at the Cordelia, with a frown upon his brow. He did not stir.

She touched him once more, and he turned his head.

"Oh, it's you," he said.

"Yes, it's I, Jack." He did not answer her, and she spoke again, with a little "Well?" of tender reproach.

He bent and touched his lips to her brow.

"Oh," she cried, with pained surprise, "you didn't *want* to kiss me!"

"Nonsense!" he returned. Her voice smote his conscience.

"No," she softly insisted, "you didn't want to."

"Nothing of the sort!" His denial was almost gruff; and he continued with a querulous excitement: "but, I say, do you remember that I — I'm supposed to be interested in you?"

"You've told me so very often, Jack."

She had seated herself on the low chair by his easel, and she looked up into his face as she spoke.

"Do you believe it?" he asked.

"I *think* I do, Jack," she answered, smiling again.

"Then how," he broke forth angrily, "how can you go on so with that damned fellow?"

"What 'damned fellow,' Jack?"

This gentle reproof affected her lover not at all. He went on with scowling brows.

"Robert Swift."

Faith rose to her feet.

"Do you mean that you think I have — been — have been *flirting* with Adelaide's husband?"

"No — but — "

"Or that I — care for him?"

"No, Faith, only — "

"Then you do think that I have been flirting with him. You mean either one thing or the other."

"I never wronged you by such an accusation," he said coldly.

"No, but you have wronged me by the suspicion."

"It is not true," said he; "I have only warned you not to commit a folly."

"A folly!" she cried scornfully.

"Yes, a folly!" he repeated obstinately.

There was silence for a moment, and then Faith spoke. Her manner almost frightened Carnegie; but he was too proud to look at her and see that her lip quivered and her eyes overflowed with tears. He

only knew that she spoke with a hard determination he had never dreamed of hearing in that low sweet voice.

"When you asked me to marry you," she demanded, "did you think that I was a flirt?"

"Why do you ask such absurd questions?" he began nervously; but she interrupted him.

"I want you to answer me. There must be no misunderstanding. This is the first time you have ever breathed a doubt of me, and I wish that it should be the last."

"I have no doubt of you —"

"You have if you can speak so to me. What reason have you for it? Did you doubt me when you first told me that — you — cared for me? Do you think my loving you has made me any the less worthy since then?"

She paused, and then went on with sudden passion:

"Oh, I had hoped this would never have happened! I had heard of lovers quarrelling, but I had so hoped that *we* would never. Oh, do you not know that I have not been flirting with *you?* I have thought of nothing but you, and of living for you. I meant to be something more than a pleasant companion to you — I meant to be your *wife!*"

There are some men whom nature has made incapable of responding to a direct appeal. They will receive the most delicate hint, they will appreciate the feeling that underlies the most restrained and guarded manner; but their hearts close instinctively

when other hearts open. Carnegie did not quite understand this frank and simple earnestness; he was unaccustomed to it, and he had an unreasonable distrust of it. If Faith had maintained an offended silence, or had replied with angry sarcasm, her lover would have guessed at the pain he was inflicting, and the cruelty of his tone toward her. But now, from a small injustice he went to a greater one.

"I never doubted anything but your discretion," he said coldly, "your knowledge of the world. You must not be offended, my dear, if I warn you against the nonsense of a clever fellow who thoroughly understands women's fancies — I don't say their hearts, but their fancies."

"Do you think I need such a warning?"

"It seems you do."

If this was a lovers' quarrel, no wonder Faith had hoped that none such might come between their hearts. This talk went from bad to worse, and at every speech her cheek tingled as though beneath a blow.

She strove to stop it, and only made matters worse.

"Do you say that because I spoke to Mr. Swift just now?"

She was arguing with an angry man who knew himself to be in the wrong. There is not a more unreasonable creature in the universe. Carnegie at once began to hunt for grounds for a suspicion which he had never seriously entertained.

"No, not because of that only. But he is constantly at your house, and wherever you may be, at

the theatres, or here, he is constantly turning up. I suppose it is the same in the 'fashionable world' where you go and I don't."

Faith was silent for a moment, half from astonishment and half from pain.

"Do you think that I encourage him? Do you think that I have ever even noticed this? — if it is so — as you say."

"I have not said that you do encourage it. I simply call your attention to the fact that this sort of thing is going on."

She made no reply. He waited for one, and when none came, his spirit began to trouble him. This mute protest touched him more nearly than her indignant words.

"You are very young, Faith, and your inexperience may mislead you into listening to a man like Swift — "

"And if I did listen to him, what do you expect him to say to me?"

This was a blunt and embarrassing question which re-awakened Mr. Carnegie's bad temper.

"I don't wish the fellow to say anything to you," he cried, "I don't wish you to have anything to do with him."

"Are you giving me a command?"

"You may take it as you please. It is something which I feel it my duty to say to you. There is nothing offensive or unkind about it, unless you choose to make it so."

"I do not see," said Faith, turning her pale face

away from him, "how I can make it anything else. I thought that there was perfect confidence and trust between us; but if you mean what you say, you cannot trust me."

"I may trust you, and at the same time I may warn you. It seems to me that the mistrust is on your side. You flare up and accuse me of all manner of suspicions, just because I tell you not to do an imprudent thing. And when I make a suggestion, you ask me if it is a command."

This whole speech was a retreat on Carnegie's part; but Faith did not understand it.

"You know that I am not angry with you," she said, "but what you said was not a suggestion, it was a command. You know that I would do anything you could ask of me; but I never thought you would *order* me not to be careless of my name and — and —"

Her voice broke for a second.

"It is a cruel imposition on my love," she went on.

Carnegie, wavering between anger and penitence, was again moved to the side of anger.

"You might as well say at once that it was an imposition on my part to ask you for your love in the first place. Perhaps I did wrong in doing that."

"Perhaps you *were* wrong," she replied slowly, "if you understood me no better than this."

Carnegie had said some cruel things within the last five minutes, things which he already repented; but of all the hard blows dealt in this foolish and aimless little battle, this was the hardest, this speech

delivered in a girl's soft voice, with no ring of anger or spite, but quietly and deliberately. The man was fairly staggered.

"This is the only fear I have ever had since I have known you," she went on, "the fear that your cynical distrust would some day hurt us both. I feared that it would come, and I am afraid it has come now. I knew that I could not expect perfect trust from a man who trusted nothing else in the world. I knew that in time you would begin to doubt and question my — my affection."

She took the white rose from her breast. Her speech had been only sad until now; but there was a little flush of anger on her cheeks as she said, —

"This very flower — you would pick it to pieces to find if it were pure and sweet — and you would kill it with your dissecting-knife."

The very last tempting demon of madness that ever moved Jack Carnegie prompted him here to say:

"People don't dissect flowers with knives."

"And now you are flippant!" said Faith.

Carnegie came to himself.

"Faith, forgive me!" he cried; "I don't know what has made me talk so like a fool and a brute. Give me that flower, my darling, and see whether I will touch one petal of it. Don't stand there like that, dear, holding it as if you were going to drop it on a coffin — don't look so strange, Faith! What do you mean? Give me that rose, Faith!"

"No!" she said.

CHAPTER V.

A SUDDEN CRISIS.

"DO you mean that?" asked Carnegie. He was startled, and he could not but recognize the intense determination in her voice.

"I must mean it," she answered.

Carnegie hesitated. He was bewildered. How had all this come to pass? There was a royal fool of history who once carelessly agreed to give his favorite one grain of wheat for the first square on the chessboard, two for the second, four for the third, and so on. When the computation was made, he found that the granaries of a dozen kingdoms would not pay the debt. Carnegie was in a like case. He had trifled for one instant with love, and now love had vanished wholly.

Or so he thought. He knew just enough of Faith Ruthven's character to misconstrue it. He knew that she was not the girl to lightly give or take away affection. What she said, he knew she meant. Yet he could not understand how at the end of a brief lovers' quarrel she should be fixed on breaking her troth. That she should threaten it was not impossible at all, though it was certainly out of keeping

with her character. But that a few unpleasant words — and Jack really did not understand that he had said more — should move her so he could not comprehend — he could not believe.

Of course she might well be offended at his hinting that she had been encouraging Bob Swift. In the hurried mental review of the situation which he allowed himself before speaking again, Carnegie saw that there was an element of unpardonable grossness in the suggestion, if it was regarded as a cold-blooded accusation. But he did not see how Faith could think him capable of this. And even if she was offended, had he not begged her pardon? He did not understand this at all. Any other woman would have had her little fit of bitter reproaches and tears, and would have been in his arms by this time. Was Faith Ruthven the shortest-tempered and hardest-hearted of women, or — he would not trust his own thoughts further in that direction.

He spoke, at last, with a manly frankness and simplicity which would have availed him much five minutes before.

"Faith," he said slowly, "you can't mean it, and you don't mean it. You are angry with me now, and I will own that perhaps you have a right to be; but don't — for God's sake, don't go so far as this. You have entirely misunderstood me; but I beg your pardon for having said anything you *could* misunderstand. I was out of temper, and —"

He was going on to say that his irritation had sprung from his inability to get speech with her;

but she did not wait for this explanation. He had quite unconsciously touched the key-note of her grief and anger, and her pale cheeks flushed again as she interrupted him:

"You had better stop! You are only making it worse. I wish you *had* suspected me! It would have been less — degrading."

The girl was now in a state of feverish exaltation. Her alarming coldness had given place to a phase of anger which was much more familiar to Carnegie in his experience of women. But there was nothing re-assuring about the change. She did not raise her voice, she did not burst into tears; but she spoke in nervous, quivering tones that testified to a half-successful struggle for self-control.

"Faith," cried Carnegie, who was now simply anxious and perplexed, "won't you tell me what is the matter? What have I done?"

"No!" she returned, "you would never understand. I know you now — I did not before. Oh, I wish I had not known!"

She walked quickly toward the door, and paused half-way. Carnegie saw her white throat quiver with a suppressed sob before she spoke.

"Take me out of that picture — *sir!*" she said, and pointed to it, and then, with a sob that was not repressed at all, she rushed from the room.

Of course, Carnegie's natural impulse was to stop her flight; but he checked it. He had a strong idea that she would scream if he attempted anything of the sort — scream not for the purpose of alarming

others, but simply from nervousness. Beyond this, Jack Carnegie knew nothing whatever about Faith, or so it seemed to him. All his previously conceived ideas of her character had disappeared. He found himself in a condition of dazed astonishment.

His anger had wholly departed, and, as yet, he was too much surprised to be sorrowful. He was not ready to believe that Faith had really thrown him over. He was determined that she should not throw him over. That idea he would not entertain for an instant. He would have to do something to put affairs back on the old footing — what, he did not exactly know; but he felt that he could postpone consideration of ways and means to a time when his head was clearer.

He bolted the door, went back to his picture and looked at the face of Cordelia, and wondered much over Faith Ruthven.

In a very doubtful way he began to see an interpretation of the revelation of character which had just been made to him. He did not fully understand what it signified; and few men would have seen much deeper — certainly no man whose mental dealings were entirely with things external and visible. There is a wild popular idea that artists are good students of character. The only basis for this ascription seems to be the fact that they have to learn a good deal, in an empirical way, in the course of their work. Any man who is accustomed to looking on the material world as a collection of objects to be resolved into their component parts of line and hue

for purposes of reproduction, must, sooner or later, get to associating the known spiritual quality of certain things with its typifying form. Hence an artist, even a man whose special business may be other than the painting of men and women, learns readily to read what is set before him on a human face, and what with personal experience and the natural instinct of taste, makes a guess at character, which is only a guess, but is enough to found a prejudice on.

In some such dull and dim fashion, Carnegie began to comprehend the cause of Faith's seemingly extravagant distress. His reflections were most comforting to him, for they involved an abandonment of the only other hypothesis upon which he could have accounted for her excitement and her sudden dismissal of him — the painful supposition that she loved some one else, possibly the very man who had excited his vague jealousy.

It is not often that a man will condescend to discuss with himself matters of this sort. It is repellent to his manhood to acknowledge that they must be judged by the same standard as the affairs of every-day life. Yet when a certain point is reached, even the most sensitive of men must turn his logical powers on the consideration of questions that it gives him pain merely to formulate. Carnegie had reached this point. Set face to face with this strange outburst of irrational anger on the part of the woman he loved, he had to ask himself whether indeed a stern truth had not been the inspiration of his trivial suspicions. He could feel that this was

not the fact, but he could not make it logically clear to himself that it was not. Certainly Faith ought not to care for such a trifler as Bob Swift. But how many others had cared for that same trifler! Others, of course, not like Faith — yet how could he swear that Faith was unlike these others? Adelaide Swift was certainly a woman of great capacity for intense affection, and she had certainly loved, for the first time, with a fervor strange to most women. Yet all the fire of her passion had been transferred to her husband, and that most suddenly.

Blundering about in this way to try to find for himself a satisfactory explanation of the difference between the natures of the two women, Jack's uneasy brain was led to dwell more deeply than at any previous time upon the character of the woman he loved. And as a man might discover that the smoke-begrimed picture that has hung over his mantel a score of years is the priceless work of some master hand, so Carnegie began to see that in this girl's soul there was a subtle and strange element of nobility for which he had scarcely given humanity credit.

He did not know the value of his discovery; but it was with a keen delight that he recognized the existence in Faith's character of a pure fidelity so delicately strong that it was wounded not at the suspicion he had expressed, but at the expression of suspicion. This girl loved him with a love so strong and so tender that it rose up in arms at the

very thought that his love was liable to be affected by any external influence whatever. Her grief had been caused by his tone, his manner; she had probably paid little heed whatever to his words.

She had looked for a love from him as ideally sensitive and deep as her own; and she had quarrelled with him merely because she found him subject to the ordinary weaknesses of mortal men. This was what Jack Carnegie made of it; and it was but a broad and awkward setting forth of the truth.

He was profoundly pleased, flattered and embarrassed at the conclusion that forced itself upon his mind. There were other men than Jack Carnegie who might have been made sad by the discovery that they had to deal with a love so pathetically sensitive; but Jack was little more than embarrassed.

"I'll be eternally in hot water, I suppose," he said to himself; "by Jove, I must take care never to get within a mile of doing such a thing again. This is almost too delicate ground for me. Now Kent would understand all those subtleties of a woman's character like a book. He's a wonderfully sympathetic fellow, with his tact and his perception and all that. Queer that man hasn't a spark of passion in him."

There came a knock at the door. There had been several before during the time he had been communing with himself, but he had paid no attention to them. They were only the timorous knocks of the stranger. This knock was a determined one, several times repeated.

Carnegie opened the door with an expression of expectancy on his face, changing to pure annoyance as he saw Adelaide Swift standing before him, handsome, flushed and defiant.

"Are you looking for your husband?" he inquired, holding the door half open.

"No, sir, I am not looking for my husband," she replied with an imperious little gesture that made him stand back; "my husband is with the McGilligaskie girls, and I have just met Faith Ruthven going to join them."

She paused, but Jack made no reply. He knew of old that the look in her dark eyes was one of serious mischief.

"Oh, you needn't frown like that," she said, with quick ferocity, "I *will* see you, John Carnegie."

"There is nothing to prevent your seeing me. You see me now."

"Oh, don't talk to me in that absurdly grave tone," she said flippantly, closing the door behind her and walking into the middle of the room.

"Remember, sir," she went on, "I am your past."

"Does that mean," Carnegie inquired, "that you intend to be my future?"

"Oh, no, have no fear of that. Just at present my business is with the past."

"That business," Jack remarked sententiously, "was closed long ago."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carnegie."

"For what?"

"For contradicting you."

"I don't understand you."

"The business was *not* closed."

"What do you mean, Adelaide?" He turned upon her in genuine surprise.

"Mr. Carnegie," she answered, with a little emphasis upon the address, "do you know that you have never returned my letters?"

Carnegie stared at her.

"You have never returned my letters."

"You never asked for them."

"I am quite well aware of that. It was not exactly convenient at the time, as perhaps you will remember."

Carnegie remembered, no doubt, but he said nothing.

"And besides," she went on, throwing herself into a chair, languid, careless and graceful, "I was not much troubled about them. I knew they were safe with you — safer perhaps than they would have been if I had had them myself."

She paused as if expecting some observation from him, but he made none.

"I think the time has come now to give them to me."

"I beg your pardon," he said, moving toward the further end of the room, "I should have thought of it before. I'll —"

"*You'll look for them!*" she supplied with emphatic scorn; "don't!"

He turned with an inquiring glance. What *did* this woman mean?

"There's no hurry. I don't want you to make a mistake and give me some one else's letters."

The ensuing pause was awkward. Carnegie walked back to where he had been standing, as though in obedience to her desire. But she had hit upon the truth. He had no idea where those letters were stored away. He knew that it would require a little search. Even on love-letters the dust falls thick in five years.

She did not, however, insist upon her advantage.

"But you don't ask for yours," she said.

"I don't want them."

"I thought you might need them for models for future use."

Carnegie smiled grimly.

"I think my style ought to be somewhat chastened by this time."

Adelaide did not care to have him leading the conversation, especially if he was going to take this tack.

"I know very well where yours are. They are lying in a little handkerchief box you gave me once — I suppose you have forgotten it — in the little cherry-wood escritoire."

She evidently expected that the mention of the escritoire would awaken a memory in Mr. Carnegie's breast, but if it did he gave no sign.

"You don't remember the little cherry-wood escritoire?" she continued. "Of course not, you never saw it. It was in my room at the boarding-school. But you gave me a Yale lock to put on it

so that I might keep those letters safe. Do you remember that?"

"I think I do."

"You were more anxious about them then than you are now."

"My dear Mrs. Swift," said Carnegie, at the end of his patience, "the situation has completely changed since that time. You are now married and you have a husband, and you may be supposed to have both the discretion and the inclination to put those letters where they would be safest. And in my opinion, if you will permit me to say so, the safest place is the fire. I thought they had gone there long ago."

"You expected me to burn your letters?" she asked, not exactly reproachfully, but as though the possibility were suggested to her for the first time.

"Certainly I did."

"Why have you not burned mine?"

When a woman asks a direct question, in nine cases out of ten it is an unpleasant one for the man questioned. This was no exception.

If Carnegie had told the truth he would have said that he had not burned them because it was a year before he had had the heart to look at them, and by that time he had forgotten them. The first part of this explanation would have done very well, but the only way in which he could account for his negligence during four years was not complimentary to the lady. And while Adelaide did not care if what

she said was uncomplimentary to her old lover, social etiquette checked his masculine frankness as effectually as though he had been introduced to her only yesterday.

He felt that he must cut the talk short.

"When and where can you make it convenient to receive your letters?"

He had a presentiment that she would insist upon his coming to her house at some unconventional hour in the morning, when she could receive him in half *negligé*, and have a little scene of sentimental reminiscence.

"I didn't know," he said to himself, "that she was getting so old as to take pleasure in that sort of nonsense."

He knew that this was a mild form of mental and moral intoxication in which the *passée* woman with a past is prone to indulge. But he was mistaken if he thought that Adelaide considered herself *passée*. His eyes were promptly opened.

"*Here*," she said instantly, "in this studio, at half-past eight to-night."

"*What!*" he gasped. He could not believe that he had heard her rightly.

"You'd like to send them by express, wouldn't you?" she cried with scornful animation; "well, I have some things to say to you that must and shall be said."

Then her manner changed again.

"Come," she said, her eyes sparkling, "don't oppose a poor woman's fancy. Am I so dreadful

that you dare not see me alone? Or are you afraid that I may compromise you?"

"Well, yes," said Carnegie, plainly.

She laughed in her peculiar way, which always suggested to Carnegie's ear the excitement of champagne. He noted now that there was a ring of triumph in the laugh. She seemingly thought that she had achieved some much-desired object.

"Then you may prepare to go into a monastery at once," she cried, "for I certainly shall come. Oh, don't look so frightened! I have no serious designs upon your peace of mind. It is only for a little business chat, and to bury the past."

"It will be a lively funeral," said Carnegie, involuntarily.

"What do you say?"

"I say that I won't have it!"

"I say you *will*—"

"Nonsense, I—"

The handle of the door turned noisily. They both looked in that direction, and saw a man peering cautiously in as he swung the door back. He was evidently from the country, for he wore a suit of black broadcloth, the coat a monstrous garment, with lappels that fairly reached to his waist. A tall silk hat was on his head, an umbrella under his arm. Behind him were three women with huge beflowered bonnets, and flowing, beribboned leg-of-mutton sleeves.

"Come in, Mehitabel," said the man, over his shoulder: "this here's another painter-place."

The women crowded behind him and the man took one disastrous step forward. The projecting handle of his umbrella struck a statuette on a bracket near the door-post, and threw it to the floor, where it broke with an alarming crash. The stranger stood stupefied for half a second and then recovered his presence of mind.

"Mehitabel!" he cried, wheeling around, "Jemimy! git along — git along — *git along!*" and, spreading his arms with the action of driving a flock of geese, he rushed his women out of the room and jerked the door to after him with one enormous foot.

Adelaide burst into a mad laugh, and fled before Carnegie could recover himself.

CHAPTER VI.

AN IDLE APPOINTMENT.

POOR Faith had checked her sobs when she met Adelaide in the corridor, but subtler evidences of her excitement gave her friend a hint of what had been going on.

"They have had a quarrel," thought Adelaide, "and I'll be bound that it came of Jack's speaking to her about Robert," — a conjecture that did not call for much acuteness on Mrs. Swift's part.

Of course Adelaide was sweetly unconscious of the fact that there were tears in Faith's eyes, and that her cheeks were red and pale by turns. She only smiled, refrained from remark, and went direct to Carnegie's studio.

Faith found her father in Moreland's room. Mr. Moreland was a man who once in early life had been told that his palette was set with a Titian red. Since that day he had devoted his life principally to mingling his pigments in the tones affected by the old masters. Nobody could have quarrelled with him for this; but he insisted upon spreading the results of his laborious blending upon canvas. Moreover, it was his taste to choose ultra-modern

and realistic subjects; and the effect, while pleasing to the populace, was trying to the cultured eye.

Mr. Moreland was a successful man; he sold his pictures, and got newspaper notices which said that he had rediscovered the lost secrets of color of the great Italian painters. Mr. Ruthven was always very polite to Mr. Moreland. He never bought that artist's pictures, but he always praised them

Faith was obliged to contemplate a small canvas whereon there was a bit of deeply, darkly, beautifully blue sky, coming out finely against the corners of a clapboarded house. There was a window near the corner of the house, and realistic green blinds to the window, and a still more realistic yellow linen window shade inside of the blinds. Through this window streamed the light of a lamp, falling on a group in the snow outside, composed of two very well-dressed little girls, praying energetically over the corpse of a small and hard-frozen beggar-boy.

"Look at the illumination, Faith, my love," said Mr. Ruthven, waving his gold eye-glasses with his favorite gesture; "I was just telling Moreland that there's a tone-quality in his coloring which reminds me of — Leonardo; 'pon my soul it does. And observe the touching sentiment of the picture, my dear — the little girl and — the — ah — very sweet!"

Mr. Ruthven could not make quite sure of the sex of the figure on the ground.

Faith was in no mood for looking at pictures, but she felt grateful for a chance to direct her treacherous eyes downward until she should have gained some control over them.

All tne bustle and chatter that she heard about her had a far-away sound to her ears. She answered when she was spoken to, and wondered at her own self-possession. She was even able to murmur a few words of meaningless compliment to Mr. Moreland and to his brother-artists; for Ruthven made his rounds conscientiously, and dragged her with him. But it was all a sad jumble of noise and painty smell, and pictures and people, to the poor girl. So confused an impression did she get of it all that sometimes she doubted if she could distinguish between what was real and what was painted; and it seemed to her that the artists, with beards and velvet jackets and smoking-caps, were only part and parcel of the artistic "properties" of their respective studios.

And the pictures! what a kaleidoscopic confusion of line and color danced before her eyes! Marchbanks's inevitable Indians crossed his regulation river to gaze upon Hook's regulation diaphanous nude female standing out in a wood, saved from immodesty by nothing but her own back hair and her anatomical improbability. Old Camperdown's smooth portrait of an obviously wealthy and aristocratic lady simpered over its alabaster shoulder at young Birckfelder's "Impression of a Bad Night in Munich." Crome's clean, pink-cheeked and unpleasantly waxy farm-children played see-saw, as usual, against the impossible background of the square yard of variegated reds and browns which it soothed the artistic soul of Mr. Cripps from Munich to call a view of Algiers.

Chance favored her. She saw no one whom she knew until she reached the extensive studio of an artist whose years of study in Germany had not in any way enfeebled a fine faculty for business which would have made him a man of success in any profession. This apartment was a cross between a small concert-hall and the lobby of a museum. About two thousand dollars' worth of artistic bric-à-brac — it looked a good ten thousand worth, as the man remarked who furnished it from his own warerooms, and secured himself with a chattel mortgage — was scattered about floor and walls and ceiling. Behind the curtains at one end a band played fifteen dollars' worth of music every reception-day, from two until four. The artist stood in the centre of the room and languidly received his guests. If any one vaguely suggested giving him an order, he scouted the idea with contempt, and said he had no time. His line of conduct served to inspire the commonplace "patron of art" with a fine liberality when they really came down to business. This may not have been art, but it offset expenses.

This studio was crowded, and Faith got behind an easel with a large painting, and examined a sketch resting upon the floor. The artist was on the other side of the easel, talking with a lady who had ordered from him a picture of her daughter. The picture was on view.

"I don't think you've quite caught the likeness," timorously objected the mother.

"You will allow me, madam," returned the artist, severely, "to be the best judge of *that*."

Faith moved away to hear no more. She came upon Kent, listening with courteous resignation to Mrs. Smith.

"Then it is fixed and understood and unchangeable," the sprightly widow was saying: "you dine with me to-night."

"If you'll permit me to tear myself away immediately after dinner. This reception, you know, is amusement to you, but business to me."

"You shall go straight away to your horrid writing *immediately* after dinner," Mrs. Smith assured him. "I'm sure you are making yourself ill with too much work."

Kent smiled and said, —

"We poor journalists have to work hard, Mrs. Smith."

He was not unwilling to keep up this delusion on general principles, and in the case of Mrs. Smith as a matter of absolute necessity. Mrs. Smith was growing too anxious for his company.

"Then we may expect you at six? Is that early enough to suit you?"

"Quite."

"I've got into shockingly early hours of late. I'm so lonely, you know, that I hail dinner as a friend, and I drag the hour forward every day. I shall soon get back to the country dinner at two in the afternoon."

"That is a sad prospect," remarked Kent, thinking of the days when the state of his purse had a great deal to do with the selection of his dinner hour.

"And then," she went on, "it's impossible to get to the theatre, you know, unless one dines early. And really, the theatres are almost all that I care about now. I forget the humdrum of my own existence in seeing people who get some excitement out of their loves and hates. Oh, why do I never have a hand in anything dramatic?"

"Be patient!" cried Adelaide, coming suddenly up behind them; "I'll try to let you have a hand in something dramatic."

"Oh, what is it, dear?"

"Never mind!" Mrs. Swift answered. "Does Mr. Kent dine with you to-night?" she went on, abruptly.

"Yes," faltered Mrs. Smith, slightly embarrassed.

"Then it will be a *partie à trois*, Sara, for I am going to dine with you too."

Mrs. Smith kissed her with the effusion of insincerity.

"You darling!" she cried.

It spoiled her *tête-à-tête* with Kent, but she made the best of it, poor woman.

As to Kent, he became unusually gracious to Adelaide, and, for fear that she might change her mind, instantly offered to finish the round of the studios with the two ladies, and see them home.

"But what will become of Swift?" he inquired, "if you are to dine out?"

"What usually becomes of him," Adelaide answered bitterly.

"What is that?"

"I don't know," she said.

"Have you told him?" was Mrs. Smith's inquiry. A husband, whatever he might be personally, was a sacred thing in her eyes.

"No, I have not," was Adelaide's reply: "Mr. Kent, will you hunt up the McGilligaskie girls and tell him?"

Then they drifted away with the crowd, and Faith, who had drawn back into a corner to avoid them, hurried to find her father.

Kent discovered Swift in O'Gorman's studio, hovering around with the McGilligaskie girls, who were admiring one of O'Gorman's characteristic autumn landscapes. This was a *tour de force* of compliment which only novices ever attempted. Mr. O'Gorman's landscapes were always autumnal, and the six or eight score of which he had disposed during ten or fifteen busy years were almost indistinguishable one from the other. They were all of a mild and subdued gray, and each was a composition of trees and distant mountains. The mountains were always the same, and the differences in the trees were so slight as to escape any but the most practised eye. Experienced art critics always referred to Mr. O'Gorman's works in the most general terms. They acknowledged them as models of purity and quiet tone, but evaded specific criticism.

Swift hailed the intelligence which his friend imparted to him with undisguised satisfaction.

"I was afraid I'd have to go home and catch it this evening," he said, "by Jove! Kent, I did.

You heard how she went on this afternoon in Carnegie's place. Awful, ain't it? And I really hadn't done anything to deserve it. I never do. It's all fancy on her part, you know."

"Of course," Kent answered him, "you're the model husband; everybody knows that. What shall I tell your wife? — that you have no objection to her dining with Mrs. Smith?"

"Not the least in the world," Swift said earnestly; "whatever gives her any pleasure is all right, of course. Perhaps I'd better go and tell her so myself, or she'll get some new idea in her head. She'll imagine that I want to go off and enjoy myself somewhere. I say, Kent!"

He turned to his companion as though struck by a sudden idea.

"Well?"

"What do you say to going down to Coney Island? If you're going to dine with them at six and cut away right after dinner, you'll just have time to meet me somewhere and run down and take in the end of the evening. It's opening night there, you know, and lots of the boys will be on hand. I wouldn't miss it for anything."

Kent reflected. A little masculine society would be a great relief after an hour or two of Mrs. Smith. He decided that he would go, and told Swift so.

"Then you'll meet me and go? That's so much better than travelling down there all alone!" said Bob eagerly.

"I will meet you and go. Do you doubt it?"

"Well, you know, old man, we haven't been running together much of late."

"Bachelors shouldn't engross the time of married men," Kent replied; "but for a companion for Coney Island, Swift, I don't know your equal. Where shall we meet?"

Swift pondered for a second.

"Here," he said, "in Carnegie's room. Carnegie's man sleeps here, and he'll open for the first to come. Say half-past seven to eight, eh?"

"But why *here?* That's an odd idea."

"Well, old man," said Swift, in a stumbling, shamefaced way, "fact is, I don't want to be seen to-night in any of the places where I generally hang out, you know. I always have the most infernal luck — it comes round to my wife somehow. And I always used to meet Jack here, you know. Make it here."

"Hadn't I better tell Carnegie? Perhaps he'd like to come."

"It's no use. I knocked at his door just now, and it was locked."

CHAPTER VII.

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

THE noise of many voices and many footsteps died away in the great studio building as the evening shadows fell over the quiet old-fashioned street. The crowds melted away; a few carriages rolled off to the north and east; but most of the visitors took their homeward way on foot.

It was one of those first evenings when no touch of springtime rawness lingers in the warm air. There was a delightful temperature throughout the city that made people long for motion in the broad open streets. It is these days, when the summer first makes her presence felt, that we most prize of all the year. There are precious hours of the golden autumn to which we cling with a sad expectancy of harsh breezes and leafless trees; but there is a gladness in the opening summer that in some tender way hints of undefinable hope and promise to every heart.

Poor Faith Ruthven's heart felt little of this as she walked home on her father's arm, and lent an inattentive ear to his æsthetic maunderings. He noticed this, and he at once spiced his conversation

with some of those caustic sayings which relieved his character from the imputation of "softness." Nobody ever called Mr. Ruthven "soft" who had once winced under his cruel little insinuations, or grown angry over his subtle sarcasm. This was well understood by all who knew him. Not everybody, however, knew that the refined Mr. Ruthven could be extremely brutal when he felt so disposed.

Faith's father got off two or three bits of sarcasm which he himself felt were more than neat; but he quite failed to awaken his daughter's interest. Then he became more vigorous.

"That absurd Moreland!" he remarked, "really, I must *not* venture into his studio again. He positively makes me ill with his chromatic nightmares. I wonder if the man actually thinks that I am ever going to buy one of his ridiculous pictures. Upon my soul, Faith, I'd rather hang a Japanese umbrella next to my best Diaz than that horror of his in blue and white and yellow."

"The one you said was like Leonardo?" inquired Faith, absentmindedly.

This made her father frown.

"Really, Faith, I should think you could see through such palpable irony. You appear to have taken it as seriously as the man himself. As Mr. —er— Kent says, women and artists have no sense of humor."

"Wasn't it a little cruel, papa, for a joke?" Faith asked, trying to arouse herself.

"Cruel, my dear?" said Mr. Ruthven, accepting

this question as a tribute to his powers of irony; "not at all. Far from it! It was kindness in the highest degree — benevolence, I may say. Didn't you see how pleased the little fellow was? He will plume himself upon that compliment for many a day."

"But suppose he should some day be undeceived?"

"He never will be. He can't be — er — undeceived. Why, my love, if you were to go to him now and tell him that I had been — er — making fun of him, he would not believe you. It would make no impression whatever upon his enormous self-conceit. My dear Faith, you don't know artists as I know them."

Mr. Ruthven had indeed a through acquaintance with the foibles of humanity in general. His analytic eye took note of all that was weak or shameful in all mortals, with one exception. That exception was himself.

But his daughter seemed to care nothing whatever for his cynical exploitation of human frailty. It was an old story to her, and her thoughts were elsewhere.

She relapsed into a silence broken only by occasional perfunctory expressions of assent to the various propositions he put forth, and she leaned heavily on his arm as they walked homeward, while the gray-whiskered, aristocratic old gentleman poured forth a stream of highly intelligent conversation and gesticulated gracefully with his eye-glasses, not wholly unconscious of admiring passers-by.

The Ruthvens had lived for thirty years, ever since the advance of the plebeian city had forced them to vacate the old family house on St. John's Park, in a broad, solid, old-fashioned house in the lower part of Fifth Avenue, not so far from Washington Square that the south wind could not bear through the open windows a breath of the sickly pungency of the ailanthus-trees. It was a cheerful, sunny house, with wide windows opening on roomy balconies, with spacious, high-ceiled rooms, rich with wainscotting and broad folding-doors of old mahogany. Although it was not a new house, it was a house built with a certain determination to be modern. In its internal structure it was a cross between the conventional New York style and that far worse abortion known as the "English basement." There were two large reception-rooms on the first floor, with a dining-room and a picture-gallery beyond, and a grand parlor opening on a fair-sized garden. Above, in the front, was what Mr. Ruthven called, with lofty affectation of vulgarity, the "living-room."

By this homely term he designated a bright and airy apartment where he kept the most intimate of his art-treasures, and where he and Faith ate their dinner on the rare occasions when they dined alone. Back of this were his own rooms and hers. In the one story over this, the best rooms were empty, and the worst were allotted to the servants.

Mr. Ruthven made no remarks on his daughter's obvious depression of spirits; but he watched her

closely all through dinner. She said little, and she ate little. He saw that something had happened; but he was at a loss to guess what. He suspected her vaguely of taking too warm an interest in Carnegie; but he had no idea whatever that there was anything more between them than the first foreshadowings of a sentimental feeling which he had determined to discourage most effectually as soon as it made itself clearly apparent.

To do Mr. Ruthven justice, he did not watch his daughter so closely as to make deception necessary in eluding his eye. Faith's love-affair had been carried on in the most simple and natural way. Had Mr. Ruthven had the slightest reason to suspect her of caring more for the young painter than he wished her to, he would have had only to open his eyes to find out the truth. That he had not found it out was simply because he had never thought to look. He had contented himself with limiting their opportunities for conversation when they had met in his presence, and that he had done with unobtrusive diplomacy.

He did not even now connect Jack Carnegie with the distress which Faith showed in her silence, her pallor and her downcast eyes. If he thought of any man as being directly responsible for it, that man was Robert Swift. Had Mr. Ruthven looked at his daughter with the eye of affection, rather than through the gold-rimmed glasses of cultured intelligence, he might have seen that, before the meal came to an end, her sad face was lit up with a tender

light, and her delicate mouth had grown firm with the fixed lines of resolution.

He saw nothing of the sort. He had made up his mind that he would await further developments before trying to investigate a matter that might be, at the most, trivial; and when the meal was over, he laid himself at full length on the most luxurious couch in the room, spread a silk handkerchief over his upturned face, and prepared to take the evening nap which he usually indulged in when there were no guests within his doors.

He took it, in fact. His placid, self-complacent spirit sank softly into slumber, and he lay in dreamless rest until the church clocks struck nine, and the moon, shining down from the clear blue sky, silvered the tops of the leaves on whose veined under-sides the gas-lamps threw a golden glare. Then his daughter was gone from the room. He rose and sought her in her own chamber. She was not there. None of the servants had seen her.

Jack Carnegie had made an end of his dinner long before Mr. Ruthven had stretched himself on his sofa. Jack had rushed through the few courses of a neighboring *table d'hôte*, had swallowed his black coffee at a gulp, and had hastened back to his studio to smoke his cigar and await Adelaide.

The old church at the corner told him, with its mellow bell, that it was seven when he entered his studio. He smoked one cigar and then another. Then he began to wonder why he had come back in

such a hurry. Megilp, though a man who delighted in sleeping early and late, had not yet gone to bed. Jack could hear him moving about, up in the gallery. He listened to Megilp, to the patter of feet in the streets, to the sound of distant wheels and the far-off cries of belated strawberry-vendors, and his thoughts ran something thus:

"What ridiculous folly the whole thing is! It's always the way with women. Spoon 'em once, and they think you must be ready to do so again whenever they feel their constitutions require a dose. Adelaide doesn't care a hang for me now. She's utterly gone on Robert. And, by the way, though he's deuced loose himself, he'd be just the one to kick up a row if he heard of his wife's being here alone. Suppose it is a kind of melancholy pleasure to her to come and talk over our past love. Suppose she feels like a twice-married woman sitting by the grave of her first husband. Well, I'm not going to shed any tears over my own grave. She's sure to be frightfully sentimental. My only safeguard will be in being brutally cynical. Kent would say I shan't find that difficult; but it wouldn't be true. That row with Faith has made me horribly nervous. I'll call there this evening if I can only get this precious weeping-match over soon enough. Half-past seven! She ought to be here."

Then he remembered that it was not yet time for her to appear, and threw away his cigar, the unlighted end of which had been spread out into pulp between his restless teeth. He lit a fresh cigar, and

settled himself to wait and smoke in patience. But not three puffs of the faint white smoke had floated out of the open window when he heard a knock at the door.

He started to his feet in surprise.

"By Jove, she's more than prompt!"

He opened the door. Robert Swift stood outside.

Carnegie drew back a step. He was a brave man, and a man of the world; but there are moments when such a man wishes he were either a coward or a fool. It is a peculiarity of situations such as that in which Carnegie found himself that they have comparatively few terrors for the sneak or the social bandit, while to the innocent man or the honest and excusable sinner they are fraught with every form of danger.

If Mr. Swift had discovered his wife's clandestine appointment at the studio, there was nothing for Carnegie to do but to seek, by every means in his power, to take the responsibility and the consequences on his own shoulders. And he had to remember, in that moment, that he was Swift's friend and Faith Ruthven's betrothed; and that he would be supposed to have sinned against them both.

Swift looked into the room for a second, and then entered with a calm —

"You here, Carnegie?"

Jack drew a long breath. He still felt sure that Swift had come to the studio because he had discovered that his wife was coming there. But it was clear that the situation was not that extremely

simple one where there is absolutely nothing to be said between men of the world. Perhaps Swift only suspected something of the sort, and had come merely to watch for himself. In that case there was an opportunity for a contest of wits between the two men. Perhaps Swift had absolutely discovered his wife's plan, yet did not put the worst construction upon it. If that were so, the other's cleverness might fairly fight the danger. He felt easier in his mind, and made ready for an intellectual fencing bout.

He could not help admiring what he considered Swift's clever assumption of surprise, as Bob, with nothing heavier on his mind than his anxiety to get to Coney Island, walked to the mirror and twitched delicately at his cuffs and his collar, while he waited for an answer to his question.

"Yes," Jack said, with a tranquillity apparently as natural as his friend's, "I came back, after dinner, to rub in a little work that didn't need much light."

Then he began to daub on a canvas the colors that chanced to be on his palette. As the canvas was not yet prepared for the oils, this little bit of theatrical business would not have deceived a technical eye; but Bob Swift's knowledge of the secrets of art was as slight as it well could be. Besides, he was looking only at himself in the glass as he talked.

"Seen Kent?"

"Not since I saw you."

"Then he didn't tell you about my wife?"

Carnegie thought that Swift was the coolest man he had ever met. He tried to do as well; but his voice was not absolutely steady as he said, —

"No. What do you mean?"

Swift turned and looked at him with some curiosity. Carnegie slapped the paint wildly on the canvas. The big bell at the corner boomed the first deep note of the new hour. There was a knock at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE'S PENANCE.

CARNEGIE set his teeth hard, and stepped toward the door. He was too late. Swift was there before him, and had his hand on the knob.

"Don't open!" cried Carnegie, involuntarily.

"Don't open? Why not?"

"Because — because I do not wish to be disturbed."

It was a stupid thing to say; but poor Jack was at his wits' end. His impulsive exclamation had betrayed his nervousness, and he could think of no expedient to put himself right. He stood facing Swift, who stared at him in an amazement unmistakably genuine. It was only for an instant, however, and then his expression suddenly changed. He smiled broadly and looked very knowing.

"Oh, you artistic scamp!" he laughed; "I thought you were nice and industrious, working here at night. Expecting some one, were you? Well, she hasn't come yet. Don't be alarmed — it's only Kent — we're going down to the beach together. Want to come along?"

Carnegie drew a quick breath of relief, and came

to his senses. He pushed before Swift and took the handle of the door.

"It's a fact," he said, "you've hit it. I am expecting — some one. Let me see if it really *is* Kent."

Bob Swift was a gentleman. He drew back at once.

"I'm sorry I came, old man," he said contritely; "I ought to have thought — that is, I should have asked your permission. How can I get out?"

The knocking was renewed.

"You can't get out any other way. The other door is closed fast. Never mind. I'll go. I was going anyway."

Carnegie picked up his hat and returned to the door, on the panels of which fell a rattle of feeble, impatient taps.

"Can't I get out by the gallery?" asked Swift.

"No, I tell you," Carnegie said, with an attempt at gruffness; for his friend's consideration made him feel acutely the meanness of his own position: "I'll go out."

Swift turned his back, and Carnegie opened the door half way and put his head out.

It was not Adelaide who had knocked so impatiently. A small telegraph messenger-boy stood in the corridor, with his dirty little delivery-book in his dirtier hand.

"Mr. Robbit Swif'!" said the small boy.

Carnegie, about to take the brown envelope from him, stopped and looked back at his friend.

"Mr. Robbit Swif'!" repeated the boy with a dull mechanical insistence.

Swift took the message, and Carnegie signed for it. He was puzzled to guess from whom it came. He hoped that it was from Kent, breaking his appointment.

"Great God!" said Swift, behind him.

"What's the matter?" Jack asked, starting.

"My wife —"

"Your wife? What's the matter?"

Swift gave him the telegram. It read, —

"Your wife taken suddenly ill. Not dangerous. Come here at once. SARA SMITH."

"Thank God!" said Carnegie, this time aloud.

"For what?" demanded Swift. He began to think that Jack was intoxicated.

"I'm glad it's not dangerous."

"Oh, yes; of course. Well, I've got to start at once. That knocks *my* evening. I wonder what's the matter."

The boy was already speeding away down the long corridors, whistling a popular tune in a piercingly high key.

"I'll walk to the station with you," Jack said.

"No, don't trouble, old man. You've got your painting to do; and besides, you'd better stay and look out for Kent and — your 'some one.'"

"I shall be back in time," Carnegie insisted; "and I need the fresh air."

Of a truth, he did. He had passed as bad a quarter of an hour as often falls to the lot of man;

and after even that brief time of feverish suspense, he felt the need of the cool evening breeze on his hot forehead. The two men set out, leaving the door unlocked so that Kent might enter without undue trouble in awaking the slumbrous Megilp. Swift said little on their way to the Elevated Road station; but he glanced sharply at Carnegie, who talked rather excitedly. It struck him as strange that Jack should go out if he were really expecting a visit of such a nature as he had hinted at. His friend's unusually talkative mood also surprised him. Altogether, he thought John Carnegie acted very much as though he had been drinking too freely. And this was the rarest possible thing with John Carnegie.

Carnegie had been gone half an hour. The shadows in the great studio were spreading into a general dusky obscurity. Darkness hid the frescoed ceiling, and crept out from alcoves and corners to swallow up vases and statuettes, Chinese idols, rare monstrosities of ivory carving, slender, tortuous Venetian and Bohemian glasses, dainty figures in Sèvres, great white casts of the fragments of the Greek statuary's art, and mediæval corselets and helmets, high pendent on the broad walls.

Slowly a faint white light began to struggle with the growing gloom, and the formless dim shadows resolved themselves into more sharply defined masses. Then on the floor, dark, waxen and spread here and there with Persian rugs of dull, rich hues,

there fell a line of bright, silvery half-rounds. The moon was shining through the arched tops of the windows above the gallery.

The long room was still. Outside, the palmate leaves of an ailanthus rustled softly. A faint murmur of the city's life, a soft rolling of distant wheels, came through the open windows above and the one casement below, that opened on the dark side of the street, where only the feeble light of a lamp lit the curtain-folds. No sound rose from the lonely pavement, save an occasional footfall that only served to accentuate the silence.

The door-handle creaked and snapped with a discordant noise, and then the door swung softly open, and a woman, slight and shapely and graceful, paused on the threshold.

The woman looked about her for a moment, half-awed by the stillness and the mystic beauty of the divided discs of light that lay sharp and silvery upon the floor. Then she came forward, and the light from the first gallery window fell upon the pure face of Faith Ruthven.

This was the tenderest and truest-souled woman that ever lived; a spirit finer than any man could ever comprehend, save one, and he, by grace of a love as delicate, as self-contained, as clear of vision as she herself could have given him.

She came with a flower in her hand, like a saint re-arisen from the dim age of legend wherefrom art draws its life-blood. No sweeter saint ever offered up the dearest of her life's treasures in a holier cause

than this. Faith Ruthven risked, without thought of the danger, without thought of the cost, her dear name, her pure fame, for love's sacred sake.

It was a girl's foolish fancy, perhaps. Say rather a child's innocent dream. For this poor child had said to herself: I have wronged my lover; I refused to forgive him when he asked my pardon; he has been unkind, but I have been cruel.

And the same exquisite sensitiveness of feeling which had led her to resent the man's unintentional shortcoming, now moved her to forgive it and to make a prompt and full reparation, which, it may be, he scarcely deserved, when she once felt that she had gone too far in her first indignation.

While her father slept his peaceful after-dinner sleep, she had pondered over the ways and means of this reparation. Her first impulse had been to write to Carnegie; but there was something about the idea of writing such a message which seemed to Faith both indirect and indelicate. Looking in his eyes, speaking only for his ears, she could do love's penance; but to put the holy tenderness of her remorseful heart on paper was to her a profanation. Nor could she wait until, in the ordinary course of events, she should see him. A quick blush had risen to her cheek at the thought that her delay might force him to seek her out and make a magnanimous appeal for the forgiveness which she owed him. There was something not masculine, yet manlike, in the strength of this girl's nature; if ever a woman had a man's keen and fine sense of *honor*,

than which this world holds nothing more noble or more subtle, she was the woman. It was characteristic of her that, having once decided within herself that it was for her to make reparation, she did not ask herself if her action was safe or wise.

It would have made no difference had she stopped to look at the matter in the light of worldly prudence. She might have reflected that it was at least hazardously indiscreet to venture alone and in secret into a man's studio, even in the man's absence. But this consideration would not have hindered her. She had an inspiration as to the manner and method in which to carry out her purpose, and she carried it out. In her eyes, she was only doing the most natural thing in the most graceful way when she slipped out of her father's house to leave in her lover's room the flower for which he had asked that afternoon, and which she had refused him.

He would find it in the morning, and he would understand the message it bore. No word, written or spoken, could convey that message more delicately.

She did not even stop to ask herself if she was likely to find the studio open at that hour. She had a vague idea that the faithful Megilp lived in some mysterious corner of the great apartment, and she scarcely realized that the hospitable temple of art ever closed its many doors.

The studio-building was but a step from the Ruthvens' house, and in that quarter of the town the sacred calm of a decaying grandeur broods over the

prim streets after nightfall. It was an aristocratic quarter once, and it is even now a sort of certificate of high respectability to live there in the house which one's grandfather built, even though that house be a Philadelphian structure of red brick and dingy-white marble.

Faith met no one on her way to the building; but in the corridor a stray young artist hurried past her. He cast one glance at her, and went his way. Outside of his dinner, the painting he was at work on, and the price he expected to get for it, the things of this world had small interest for the young man. But seeing him gave Faith a little shock of fright, and she paused at the door to think what she should say in case she found any one within.

With a blush on her cheeks at the thought of her duplicity, she invented a little story for Megilp's benefit; a very thin little story indeed, yet enough to account for her appearance.

Megilp, however, was not in sight when she entered, and the half-lit loneliness of the room was more frightful than would have been his embarrassing presence. A little shiver thrilled her as she looked around; but she was too brave a girl to be daunted by the grotesque strangeness and the gloom.

She stepped softly across one of the moon-lit spaces to a little cabinet, and lifted down from the shelf a long, slender glass, tinctured with faint iris hues by some artificer of old days, whose name sleeps with his secret. The tall lily-like calyx

caught the moonbeam as she lifted it, and it reflected a ray of cold light upon a little bronze god, placidly asquat upon the cabinet shelf. The little bronze god looked down at Faith with an impudent stare, and it seemed almost as though an ugly grin twisted his flat features as the light flashed across them.

She left him in darkness, and placed the glass on the table below the gallery. Then she sought for water, and found some in a carafe on the tea-poy set in a corner for Mr. Carnegie's luncheon. She filled the glass, and, taking the rose from her corsage, she lifted it once to her lips and then slipped the stem into the water.

Her act of penance was done. She had only to go as she had come. Yet for a second she lingered irresolutely, and suddenly, blushing for all it was dark and she was alone, she caught up the flower again and kissed it, not once, but twice and three times, before she replaced it in the water.

Then she turned to go; but she was too late. A step behind her startled her, and she looked over her shoulder and saw a white figure, tall and commanding, with loose robes flowing on the air as it advanced with long and majestic strides. She uttered a cry of alarm, and she was only re-assured when the apparition spoke in sepulchral tones:

"Fear nothing. 'Tis but I!"

Faith laughed almost hysterically in her relief. The manner was Cæsar's; but the voice was Megilp's, and in his kingly cadences there was a native

up-country twang. She was accustomed to the man's strange passion for assuming the characters of the personages in whose stead he posed, and perhaps she knew that the model's genuine dramatic faculty was no small aid to the success of Mr. John Carnegie's pictures.

"Oh, Megilp," she said, "don't be so absurd. You really frightened me."

"The gods forefend!" returned he piously, and then dropped into a colloquial tone of aggrieved dignity: "I ain't absurd, though, 's far 's I can see, miss. A man ain't no good who ain't conscientious, and I go for my art solid and conscientious. I never expected *you* would regard it as absurd."

There was a world of meaning in the slight emphasis which he put upon the "*you*," and Faith saw that the poor fellow was really pained.

"I don't think it is absurd, Megilp," she hastened to reply; "and I think it's very nice of you to take such an interest in your work. But you frightened me, you know: I didn't expect to meet a noble Roman."

"Was it Mr. Carnegie you was looking for?" inquired Megilp, and a trace of surprise and something approaching suspicion in his voice made the color rise to Faith's cheeks. She was not angry, for she knew that she had long ago won Megilp's honest heart; he had played love's messenger many a time, and the doubt in his mind was one natural and excusable under the circumstances.

"No, Megilp, I didn't want to see Mr. Carnegie.

But I lost something here this afternoon, and I ran around to look for it — a ring — a plain little ring. It wasn't expensive at all, but I valued it."

It made her blush to tell this fib, but it was to her almost an allegory. She felt that she had indeed lost a ring which answered this simple description.

"I ain't seen it, miss, and it's most too dark to look for it now; but if it's here, Martha 'll find it."

"Martha?"

Megilp was glad that the darkness of the room hid the sheepish look which he knew was on his face as he replied, —

"Martha — yes, Martha Meiggs. She is the daughter of the janitress. A comely damsel."

He tried to give these last words a blank-verse ring; but he was not quite at his ease. Faith smiled pleasantly as she said, —

"Ah, yes. Well, please ask Martha to look. I don't think she will find it, though. I shall probably — regain it somewhere else. I'm much obliged to you, Megilp."

She moved once more into the half-circle of light from the lofty window; but before she could go further she heard a nervous hand try the knob of the door. It did not open at once, and a woman's voice cried, —

"Mr. Carnegie! Jack! I'm here!"

Faith stood still and shuddered. She recognized the voice. Megilp did not; but with a tact which

was not the least of his good qualities, he sprang forward and set his back against the door.

"Shall I let her in, miss?" he asked.

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried Faith.

"Let me in!" Adelaide said from outside. "I know you're there."

"I'll go out by another door," Faith suggested, trembling all over.

"There ain't no other door, miss. Go stand somewheres where she won't see you, and I'll tell her Mr. Carnegie ain't here, and send her away."

The poor girl turned from side to side. Black as were the shadows around her, she could see none which would hide her in her light dress. Megilp came to the rescue.

"Step right up them stairs," he whispered, "right up into the gallery. I'll get her away in no time. It's most likely some lady from one of the other stujoes."

Faith had heard too much to believe this considerate fiction; but the door-knob rattled wildly, and she knew that if Adelaide Swift chose to enter she would enter. There was no time to be lost. Her pale robes rustled up the stairs, and, before she had given herself any adequate reason for concealment, she was up in the gallery, crouched on the floor, hidden behind the heavy drapery.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNFORTUNATE FLOWER.

MEGILP opened the door, and Adelaide walked in with the audacious ease of a woman who knows she is doing a desperately imprudent thing.

"You took your time to let me in," she remarked, coolly.

"I was asleep, ma'am," said Megilp, with a subtle reproach in his tone.

"It's very early for sleeping. Where is Mr. Carnegie?"

"He's gone, ma'am, and he won't be back."

"Did he say so?"

"Yes."

"Then he *will* be back."

And Adelaide sat down and drew her skirts about her.

"I'm almost sure not, ma'am."

"Light the gas," was Adelaide's only reply; "it's getting dark."

Megilp grumbled to himself as he lit the gas.

"It's no use your waiting, ma'am, I'm certain; and I've got to go out."

"Very well, go. I am not afraid to be here alone."

"All right, ma'am. Please don't forget to shut the door after you when you go out. Mr. Carnegie's very particular to have the stujo locked up at night."

And he went up the stairs to his gallery, muttering.

He saw that it was impossible to do anything with the lady in her present mood. He was confident that Carnegie would not come back, and he hoped that a quarter or a half an hour of dreary waiting would be enough for the unwelcome guest.

But Adelaide had her own ideas of the situation. She was convinced that Carnegie would return.

"Surely he'll have the sense to understand my message," she thought; "Jack used to be bright enough. I hope he'll come soon, though. I haven't much time to wait. I might have known what Robert would do as soon as he heard that I was going to stay out. Of course he's off to Coney Island, and of course he had to take that Kent with him. I don't half like Kent — I don't know why. He always seems to be making fun of me."

As she sat, absorbed in reflection, just where she had placed herself a few hours before, by the table under the gallery, her hand idly wandered toward the tall glass, and she took out the rose and carelessly inhaled its perfume. Then she began to pull it to pieces, and its petals fell on the waxen floor as her thoughts ran on:

"I wish Jack would come. Surely he's not trying to avoid me. He can't be such a coward. I'm nervous. Why do I want to see him after all? I've got to get those letters back, of course; but there's no hurry. I'm sure Robert wouldn't care if he read them now. Oh, oh, oh! if he would only care!"

Those last words came from her lips before she knew it. She rose and walked up and down in her agitation. She had paced the long room a dozen times before she suddenly found herself face to face with Carnegie, who had entered quietly.

"Here you are at last!" she cried.

"You!" exclaimed Carnegie, astonished and rude.

"Yes, I; didn't you expect to see me?"

"I thought you were ill."

His tone implied no delight in her apparent health.

"My dear Jack, are you so unversed in women's ways as not to know that they can be seriously ill instantly when they want to, and can recover with even greater rapidity?"

"I confess I do not understand," said Carnegie, coldly. "Robert was here, and I was in terror lest you should come in. I ought never to have permitted this nonsense."

"Oh, yes, you ought. You couldn't help yourself, anyway. And I knew all about Robert's being here."

"You did!"

"Certainly. I dined at Sara's, and found your friend Kent there. He told me he was to meet

Robert here this evening — that Robert was to wait for him. Immediately after that, I was taken very ill, and got Mrs. Smith to send the telegram. As soon as it was gone, I began to improve, and Sara brought out her phaeton and drove me down here as fast as her dear little ponies could trot. Of course, there wasn't room for Kent in the phaeton."

"But Robert!" broke in Carnegie: "he has gone to Mrs. Smith's to find you."

"Precisely. It will take him twenty-five minutes at least to get to Fiftieth Street and Fifth Avenue. When he gets there he will find that I am better and have gone home. Then he will follow me there, *perhaps;* though I doubt it. That's another half-hour; and I'll be there before him. Or if he comes straight here, I'll be gone by the time he arrives. In either case, I've half an hour clear."

Carnegie puckered up his lips and emitted a long-drawn sound that was neither a sigh nor a whistle, but something between the two.

"Don't you think I'm clever?" Adelaide inquired.

"Quite too clever for anything," he said with a scowl, as he unlocked his writing-desk. Adelaide's theatrical performance disgusted him. He put it down to a deep duplicity. Well as he had known her, he did not understand what a creature of passion the poor woman was, nor how insanely desperate was the re-action when she had once given up hope of any reward for her neglected and unvalued love. He thought she was practising a vulgar deception upon her husband. But if Adelaide Swift

was playing with the edged tools of revenge, it was because she was still madly in love with Robert. She fancied, as women of her temperament are apt to fancy, that she wished to resent infidelity with infidelity. She really desired nothing of the sort. Any one who could have looked to the bottom of her turbulent heart would have found there an unacknowledged hope that by resorting to the sacrifice of herself, she might reach her husband's slumbering affections through the shock to his proprietary pride in his wife. This is a horrible and mean thought; but it is the misfortune of woman that her weakness exposes her to small and shameful temptations which never come in a man's way. The honest man has always within him the strong principle of honor, stronger than all sophistry of creeds or any impulse of passion. But the purest woman has to look for spiritual help to an external and formulated religion; and if she have neither this nor love to cling to, she has no hold on anything stable.

Jack Carnegie had no such subtle speculations to waste on Adelaide. His gorge rose at the idea of base and petty trickery; his firm and steady masculine honor made him feel that this woman was playing a graceless part, and placing him in a position in which he had no right to let any one place him, and in his heart he simply cursed her obstinacy, and wished her well away.

If there are degrees in death, what is there more dead than a man's dead love for a woman? When parted lovers meet after many years, the woman

cannot help a certain faint flutter of sentiment, though it may be only like a breath of belated summer wind stirring on an autumn day. But the man will do well if he shall have even the grace to feel a mild interest in the memory of the sweet bygone days; and probably the most poignant emotion in his breast will be a purely æsthetic regret that the form which once lay within his arms has lost its slim shapeliness.

Jack Carnegie's only feeling toward Adelaide was one of careless annoyance; while, what with the dark, and the tender reminiscences, and the presence of the handsome fellow who had once been her lover, Adelaide's heart was growing dangerously tender. Whether for this reason, or in pursuance of the wretched whim which had brought her to the studio, she rose suddenly while Jack's back was to her, and turned the key in the door.

She had scarcely regained her chair when he faced her.

"Here are your letters. Now, be so good as to go at once. Don't run any more risks."

"And you can give them back to me like that," said Adelaide, "those letters — the first letters of a girl in her first love!"

"It is her first love no longer," he answered dryly.

"If it *was* so, I have been punished enough. You can't refuse me your pity, even if you have no love left."

"You don't need any pity," Carnegie told her,

with unsympathetic truth: "Bob may be a little fond of flirting; but if you made yourself half as attractive to him now as you did before you were married, you wouldn't have much cause of complaint."

"Now you are cruel and insulting!" cried Adelaide, and the ready tears began to flow.

"I'm speaking from experience," replied Jack, "and you know who gave me my first lessons in what you call 'women's ways.' Now dry your eyes and go home. You'll be there in five minutes."

Adelaide rose with pathetic dignity. She felt that she could not carry out her little plan if Jack was going to be so dreadfully commonplace.

"Dear," she said, "these letters seem like a tomb over our dead love."

CHAPTER X.

THE ACT OF SACRIFICE.

I KNEW she'd get that off," groaned Carnegie to his soul. — "Don't let that tomb be too endearing," he answered, aloud: "burn it!"

"Don't jest!" moaned Adelaide; "I can't bear it. We seem to be standing on the grave of the past. *Do* show some feeling."

This appeal had something of pathos in it; but Jack Carnegie was afraid to laugh. He took refuge in cynical sarcasm.

"I've no particular objection," he observed, "to shedding a tear over the grave; but I positively decline to go into the resurrection business."

"I think you have forgotten that you ever cared for me."

"I can't forget that your husband is my friend."

"And now you do not even respect me!"

"I beg your pardon, I do. And I don't wish to lose my respect for you. I think you had better go now."

Adelaide's whole manner changed in a flash. She stood back from him and cried out sharply,—

"I understand you! You think I don't, but I do.

You've lost your senses over that girl — that baby — Faith Ruthven. Well, you'll never have her!"

He said nothing.

"You need not deny it!" she went on, almost wildly; "there are no eyes so sharp as the eyes of a woman who has once loved a man. But you'll never have her! Do you hear me? Old Ruthven will never consent — no, never — and she's too weak to disobey him. She's not the sort of woman you loved once, John Carnegie."

Jack was quite unmoved. He put his hands in the pockets of his coat, and looked bored. Adelaide played her trump-card.

"Besides, you think she loves you. She does not! Oh, that makes you start at last, Mr. Carnegie!"

Carnegie had indeed started; but it was in sheer amazement at the woman's audacity.

"Shall I tell you whom she *does* love?" Adelaide went on, excited by her seeming success in disturbing his calm. "My husband! my husband! my husband! Yes, it's my shame to tell it, but it's your pain to hear it. I've pierced your skin now, have I? What have you to say to that?"

"Nothing," answered Carnegie, with no sentiment save utter disgust in his mind, "except what I said before: I think you had better go home at once."

"I am going now," she returned, still confident that her malice had been triumphantly successful. "I have no more to say. I came here as your

friend, and you have insulted me and made me your enemy."

It was not wholly clear to her mind how he had insulted her; but this seemed the proper thing to say, and as an excuse for her action it was as much due to her own conscience as to him. The poor woman was, indeed, very busy in her heart, fighting off a terrible sense of shame and remorse which threatened to overwhelm her if she once let it get possession of her. She was trying hard to argue with herself that she ought not to feel ashamed or remorseful; but she was conscious of a terrible sinking of spirit, and she felt that the vehemence of her attack had exhausted her capacity for defensive fighting.

She prepared for retreat.

"After all, I don't think I'd go just at present," remarked Carnegie dryly.

"Why not?"

"Because some one is coming."

It was true. Quick steps sounded in the corridor, coming toward the studio.

"Who is it?" cried Mrs. Swift, in a sudden tremor.

"Probably Kent."

"Oh, where shall I go?"

"Nowhere. What are you afraid of?"

"I can't let him see me here."

"He will have to come in. And your phenomenal ingenuity will furnish you with an excuse for your presence."

"*But I've locked the door!*"

"*The devil!*"

Well might Carnegie swear. It was awkward to have Kent find the door locked, for he must have seen the gaslight through the window opening on the street; but worse than this was at hand. The steps outside the door were the steps of two men, and it was Robert Swift's voice that cried, —

"Carnegie! Megilp! Open!"

Adelaide rushed to Jack's side, and grasped his arm.

"Oh, tell me what to do!"

"Stay here and tell the truth."

Swift rattled the handle of the door.

"I dare not — you don't know him! I'm afraid he'll kill me."

She began to whimper.

"Nonsense! He won't do anything of the kind. Be reasonable —"

She was too mad with fright to be reasonable. Her guilty, startled eyes had been roving about the room, and they fell upon the stairs leading to the gallery. She dropped Carnegie's arm, turned, and fled like a flash, and was at the top of the short flight before Jack had time to take a step.

"You're mad!" he muttered, as he lounged to the door and opened it.

"You take your time," Swift greeted him, entering with a flushed face. Kent was at his heels, looking troubled and apprehensive.

"How the deuce did you get back so soon?" asked Carnegie of Swift.

"He met me at the station," Kent made haste to reply, "at the Fiftieth Street Elevated station; and I told him that his wife was better, and had gone home. It was only a fainting-fit."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Jack.

Here Swift broke in angrily, with the manner of a man who has promised to hold his temper, but who is impatient of the delays of cool and courteous procedure.

"But she hasn't gone home. I've been there — Kent and I have been there. Where is she?"

This was addressed most pointedly to Carnegie, who responded calmly enough, for he was now on his mettle, —

"How should I know?"

"I believe she has been here."

"You believe she has been *here!*"

"I told you it was infernal nonsense, Swift," Kent put in quickly; "you see for yourself — "

"I don't see anything. He was running after her once, and I believe he is still."

"You are either out of your senses or drunk," returned Carnegie, raising his voice, "if you can insult your wife on any such idiotic grounds."

"What were you saying to her to-day when you were talking so low to each other? What were you doing here an hour ago in the dark? You were mighty anxious to get rid of me, too. What were you doing while we were knocking at the door just now?"

"Look here, Carnegie," Kent interposed, with

the voice of authority, "Swift is excited, and you musn't mind the way he is talking. I've told him that it is an absurd idea; but you must help me to set him right. You see, the janitor told us that he saw a lady come in about an hour ago — a lady he had seen to-day at the reception — and, you know, poor Bob's in such a state of anxiety about his wife that you've got to make some allowance for him."

"I don't want him to make allowance for me," cried Swift; "I want him to tell me whether he has seen my wife or not. If I'm wrong in my suspicions, I'll apologize amply to him and to her."

"I certainly shan't answer you while you address me in that way."

"But, by heaven, I *will* be answered!"

"Come, come!" said Kent; "answer *me*. It's only fair. Have you seen anything of his wife!"

"What nonsense! Why, I've only just got back myself. I went to 'The Jessamine' to read the evening papers."

This last statement was a truth.

"Very well, then," Robert persisted, quieted but unsatisfied; "Megilp may have seen her. Call him."

"Why make yourself ridiculous before Megilp?" asked Carnegie.

Kent looked hard at his friend, whose honesty in this matter he had strongly suspected, notwithstanding his protestations. He began to believe that Carnegie was as innocent as he looked, or at least that he had no reason to fear present investigation.

"I think you had better send for Megilp," he suggested.

"I insist on seeing Megilp!" Swift said, at the top of his voice.

Megilp did not wait for further commands. He appeared at the top of the stairs, with a placid —

"Was I called?"

Carnegie shrugged his shoulders and turned away. The grotesque white-draped figure came down the steps, and only Kent, of the three men below, noticed that before Megilp descended he pulled with one hand the dark curtain that, suspended from a high brass rod, closed the break in the draperies of the gallery. The rings slipped noiselessly over the smooth rod, and shut out some of the moonlight that came through the high windows.

There was no drawing back now; but Kent preferred to undertake Megilp's examination himself.

"Has any lady been here this evening?" he asked.

"Lady," repeated Megilp, in ingenuous surprise, "Lord bless me, no, sir."

"Think what you're saying," Robert broke in; "this is a very serious matter. Tell the truth!"

"Now, I think," said Megilp blandly, "there was a lady here before Mr. Carnegie come; though perhaps I hadn't ought to mention it."

Kent laid his hand on Swift's arm.

"Why not, Megilp?"

"Well, sir, she ain't been here before in the evening, and it was for me she come."

"For you? What the devil do you mean?" Swift was able to contain himself no longer.

"For to bring me my supper," explained the model, with dignity. "In absorbing Cæsar I had kinder forgotten it, and she brung it — bringed it, I should say."

"Whom do you mean?" Kent asked him sternly.

"It was Martha Meiggs, gentlemen, though I assure you —"

"Martha Meiggs!" repeated Swift.

"The janitress's daughter," Carnegie put in, gruffly. "Now are you satisfied?"

"No, I am not!" Swift felt, though he could not tell why, that Megilp was fooling him.

"I'm sorry I can do no more," said Jack, turning away again.

"Yes, you can," Robert said; "you can let me go through that upper room."

Kent caught him roughly by the arm.

"You insult your wife by these suspicions. You are going too far."

"I don't care," the other cried, breaking away; "I will know the truth. Let me go!"

But Carnegie was in front of him in an instant, barring his way.

"You may insult your wife if you choose," and there was the ring of a real anger in his voice as he spoke; "but you shall not insult *me*. You have my word. You shall *not* go up those stairs. I am master here."

"That settles it!" burst out Swift, raging like a

wild beast; "I am sure of it now. I *will* go. Let me see who will stop me!"

"*I'll* let you see!" cried Carnegie; and his heavy hand fell on Swift's shoulder. There was that moment's pause that sometimes comes before two strong and well-matched men engage in a desperate struggle. Each looked at the other with angry, questioning eyes. The shadow was on Carnegie's face; the moonlight fell on Swift's. Kent stood back from them both, with his startled gaze resting, not on them, but high up on the curtain at the head of the stairs, that stirred as no curtain was ever stirred by vagrant summer breeze.

"If my wife is not there," said Swift, awed a little by the immobile face which he could scarcely see for the shadow, "why do you not let me go there?"

The curtain swept aside with a clicking of the brass rings. A flood of silver light fell upon the stairs, broken by a tall shadow that fell athwart Robert Swift's face.

The three men, looking up, saw a slight girl in a light dress, a pale ghost of a woman, standing at the head of the stairs, and a sudden silent horror of surprise fell upon them all.

"Because I—" said a faint, sweet, tremulous voice; "I was—"

With her sacrifice completed, though the words were unspoken, Faith Ruthven raised her arms above her head, and with a little cry, tottered forward, and Carnegie, springing up the stairs, caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO CAVALIERS.

THE morning sun, streaming into the studio, had taken on a full daytime glare when Jack Carnegie awoke. He stretched a stiff and cramped pair of legs, for he had passed the night on an uncomfortable Chinese lounge. He yawned broadly and rubbed his eyes, and wondered why he was lying there, and then remembered why, and sat up, wide awake and sick at heart, to think over what had happened.

Not much in the way of actual event had occurred after Faith appeared on the gallery stairs. Robert had vanished almost instantly, and Kent had helped Carnegie to carry Faith to the lounge, and to apply such simple restoratives as were at hand. Faith had come to herself in a few moments, too weak and faint to give any explanation of her presence, and Kent had taken her home, leaving Carnegie to release Adelaide and despatch her to her own house.

Jack sat with touzled hair and heavy eyes thinking it all over. Faith's object in coming to the studio was a mystery to him, and though his eyes, as he pondered over it, rested upon a few brown and

crumpled rose-leaves on the floor, they did not enlighten him. But strangely, perhaps, this did not trouble him at all. His momentary jealousy — if he had ever been really jealous — was wholly gone from out him, and he perplexed himself very little about the matter. The most natural hypothesis seemed to him to be that she had come to act the part of protecting angel to Adelaide, and this hypothesis he accepted until such time as Faith's own explanation should destroy or confirm it.

The considerations which troubled him were purely politic. Here were the elements of a terrible scandal. Were they about to combine and explode? He thought not. Adelaide had gone, frightened and silent, and she would surely hold her tongue. There was no further danger of discovery for her, for Swift had announced his intention of going on his way to the beach, and Carnegie knew his friend well enough to be sure that he had not dared to go home that night. Swift had something of a dog's conscience; when he knew that he had done wrong he thought that every one else knew it too, and he had left the studio in a state of humiliation which he had probably proceeded at once to drown in champagne at Coney Island.

And Kent? Ah, Kent was safe — all the safer that he knew, or at least strongly suspected, the truth. Kent had hurried Faith homeward with a promptitude which was wholly unnecessary except upon the presumption that Adelaide was in hiding in that mysterious gallery. Carnegie had fully appre-

ciated this fact at the time, and he had been too grateful for his friend's tact to make any elaborate attempt to disabuse his mind of the idea which impelled such considerate action.

Carnegie turned the whole matter over and over in his mind, and he felt satisfied that there was no danger of any painful exposure — save from one quarter. He could not tell whether or no Mr. Ruthven had any knowledge of his daughter's strange errand. Faith had, of course, reached the house in safety, or Kent would have notified him at once. But Kent had not returned, and he had no means of knowing what had happened after she was once more under her father's roof. This question had to be settled as soon as possible, he felt; he must communicate with Faith. But it was now only nine, and the Ruthvens were late risers. If he could get a note to Faith by eleven, he would be doing well. So he could only torture his soul with nervous apprehension until then.

Poor fellow, he had a hard morning of it. Though his loyalty to Faith only grew as he reflected upon her danger, he could not blind himself to the fact that his betrothed had placed herself in a most compromising position. What could be said of it, what would be said of it, should it ever be known, save that this young girl had been found by two men about town, at nine o'clock at night, concealed in the studio of a young man, an artist, a cynic, and a man who had had in his time some reputation for gal-

lantry? In that hour Jack cursed himself that he was not Sir Galahad.

"Not that the scandal-mongers would respect Sir Galahad," he thought ruefully; "if they wouldn't understand *her* purity, they certainly wouldn't believe in any fellow being so saintly. But I wish to heaven I'd been a little more goody-goody five years ago."

Martha Meiggs, learning through the faithful Megilp of his presence in the studio, brought Mr. Carnegie up a tempting omelette and some rolls and a cup of coffee, on a white-napkined tray, and Mr. Carnegie, being only human, ate and drank these good things, and was the better for them.

He felt that he would be still more himself could he go to his rooms and take a bath. But his home, or his bachelor's substitute for a home, was in Madison Avenue, a mile away from the studio, and still further from Faith Ruthven's house. He felt no more inclined to make the journey than he had on the previous night, when he had walked the floor until, some time in the gray hours of the morning, he had fallen upon the hard Chinese couch for a short and heavy slumber.

He made such toilette as the facilities of the studio allowed, and then set about his work, that being the best way of killing the space between nine and eleven. Eleven, he had concluded, was the earliest hour at which he could present himself at the Ruthvens', or send a messenger there, without exciting surprise in Mr. Ruthven's conventional mind.

But he was in no humor for work. As to the "Assassination of Cæsar," he would not touch it. He tried to occupy himself with priming canvases, and soon found that employment monotonous. It was also useless, as he never had mastered the art of preparing a canvas so that it would hold paint. He always bought his stretchers ready-faced, and the yards of good raw material which he kept on hand to spoil in vain attempts at priming never had the honor of being clothed on with color.

He gave this up, and then Megilp groaned in spirit as he saw his employer fish from the rubbish in a corner a certain huge canvas bearing the faint "roughing in" of a picture which was some day to represent "Charles I. receiving shelter from a Royalist Family." This historical study had been begun four or five years ago, and there was no prospect whatever that another four or five years would see it much further on the road to completion. It was one of those stillborn failures which sometimes come to teach the best of artists that he is but mortal. Perhaps because Mr. Carnegie was not accustomed to handling large and highly elaborated groups, perhaps because he cared nothing whatever about Charles I. or the hospitable royalist family, perhaps because the work had been begun in an unlucky hour, it only grew more and more tantalizingly weak and unsatisfactory the more he labored at it. Jack Carnegie had as good a conceit of his own talent as most artists are blessed with; but in no

way could he make himself believe that this particular picture was good.

He had laid it aside a dozen times, at first to take it up again with fresh spirit; but at the end of each attempt he found Charles I. less and less kingly, and more and more like a long-haired London æsthete, belated in a damp fog and acutely apprehensive of catarrh. As to the royalist family, every man, woman and child of them took on a growing likeness to the simpering creations of the décalcomanie artist, and at last Carnegie began to believe in their actual existence, and to fancy that there was a ghastly smirk hereditary in the race which he could not paint out with material brushes and pigments.

For weary hours Megilp posed as Charles I., and Charles's faithful servitor, and the head of the royal family, and even as a royalist maiden, with a glass of wine in her uplifted hand; but to no avail; and he was as much chagrined over the failure as was Carnegie. So, in course of time, the picture was laid among the rubbish, and lifted therefrom only when a desperate fit came upon the artist, and made him take a grim delight in painting over and over again the pasty faces and the stiff figures, and increasing their resemblance to a waxwork group in a Bowery museum. Megilp had grown to regard the days marked by the reappearance of this hapless picture with a superstitious dread, and he firmly believed that they brought bad luck to the firm of Carnegie and Megilp.

Most dolefully did he grumble when he was ordered to exchange the flowing toga of Cæsar for the shabby-jaunty garments of the poor cavalier out-at-elbows who stood behind his royal master.

"I'm an artist, I am, if I *am* a model," he expostulated: "I ain't no lightning-change comique."

But Carnegie was determined, and Megilp looked up the old garments, and as he searched, sang lugubriously tuneless fragments of old cavalier songs, to exorcise the memory of Cæsar, and assist him in the "absorption" of the new character.

"To the lords of Convention 'twas Porterhouse spoke —"

he wailed as he hunted for a feather to stick in his hat, and he felt that insult was added to injury when Carnegie laughed, for no cause apparent to him.

The canvas was grimy with dust, the paint was cracked, and the artist had ended his last bout by smearing his work over with a rag until it looked like the first sketch of a Munich impressionist for a "Harmony in all the colors of the Spectrum;" but Carnegie went doggedly at it, and daubed away in silence until the mellow bell at the corner rang out the eleventh stroke that told the advent of the morning's last hour.

Then he threw down his palette.

"Megilp," he said, "I want you to go with a note to Mr. Ruthven's house. Put on some civilized clothes, and make haste."

He sat down to write the note, and Megilp, with

smothered curses, retired to his gallery. The model was not sorry for a rest from his tedious duties; but he resented the command to array himself in other garments.

"Have I got to skip two or three or four of them centuries," he demanded of himself, "and then skip back again and catch right on to the character of that cavalier? It can't be done. I ain't so powerful versatile. That's the reason he don't get no picture out of that, — he don't give me no time to concept the characters earnest and artistic."

The spirit of rebellion was in his heart, and he did not propose to obey Carnegie's mandate to the letter. He drew on a pair of black trousers over his "shapes," and exchanged his frogged maroon jacket for a black sack-coat; but he kept on the waistcoat, a garment richly embroidered in the most resplendent tinsel known to the theatrical costumer. It was with a sigh of regret that he laid aside the huge hat; he would probably have worn it had he not had a knowledge, gained from experience, of the strange and embarrassing interest which New York street-boys take in any eccentric form of head-gear. He made a compromise between taste and discretion by selecting a worn old black sombrero, into which he stuck a red cock's feather. Then he tilted the brim rakishly, and went down and found his master sealing the letter, which it had evidently cost him some time to write.

Carnegie handed it to him without looking up.

"Deliver it yourself to Miss Ruthven, if it is pos-

sible," he said; and Megilp set his left hand on his hip and sallied forth.

By the time that Megilp reached Fifth Avenue, Mr. Cecil Kent was walking down that same thoroughfare, nearly two miles to the north, thinking, with set lips and knit brows, over a little adventure with which he had met late the previous evening — an adventure very trivial after that terrible event in his friend's studio, yet an event which had, to his mind, a most serious significance.

He had seen Faith to her home, or, rather, supported her there; for she clung feebly to his arm with both hands, while her head dropped on her breast. The sad little journey was made almost in silence. Kent spoke once or twice to ask her how she felt, or to tell her that they were "almost there;" but this was only to encourage her by the kindly tones of his voice, and to break the current of her thoughts. She answered him once, faintly and brokenly, and clung the closer to him, while the hard-faced fellow's tender heart swelled in his bosom with pity, and he had much trouble to refrain from speaking the passionate words of trust and sympathy that were on his lips.

But he had too much tact and too much manliness to torture the poor child with any speech, even though it were the avowal of his love and confidence, and he did his simple duty after a gentleman's fashion, and took her to her own door, where he found her father waiting for her, in a flutter of

anxiety and selfish annoyance at being made to feel anxious.

"I met your daughter," he explained, "just as she was attacked by a sudden faint turn. It was very fortunate that I — happened along."

"Where on earth have you been, Faith, my dear?" twittered Mr. Ruthven, nervously; "I've been in the most horrible state of — er — anxiety about you. What *has* happened?"

"I went out for a walk, papa — " began Faith, feebly, and then stopped.

Kent took upon his shoulders the burden of the falsehood which she shrank from telling.

"I met your daughter a few blocks up the avenue," he said, "and I saw at once that she was feeling very faint and ill; so I begged her to accept my arm to the house."

"But — "

"I think," Kent went on, "that if you were to let her lie down for a little while she would feel better. She seems very nervous just at present. It was probably the heat and excitement of the reception, you know."

Mr. Ruthven did not know, and he was not at all satisfied; but he too had tact, and he did not press for an explanation. The two men helped the young lady to a sofa in the reception-room, and then Mr. Ruthven bowed Mr. Kent to the door, and thanked him for his kindness, and put him through a brief examination as to the exact locality of his meeting with Faith. Kent lied as circumstantially as he

thought safe, and ingeniously left several loop-holes for Faith to escape by, should there be any discrepancy in their stories.

Then he walked slowly up Fifth Avenue, and he had not reached Fourteenth Street when he heard a familar voice saying, —

"Well, *at least* you can wait until my friend comes back!"

He turned and saw Mrs. Sara Smith, seated in her pony-phaeton, arguing earnestly with a stolid Irish policeman. Kent approached her, and she turned to him with gushing welcome.

"Oh, Mr. Kent!" she cried, "you've come like a good angel, just in time. This horrid man actually wants to *arrest* ME!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Kent of the policeman.

"Fast drivin'," responded the official, gruffly and shortly.

Mrs. Smith poured forth an almost incoherent explanation:

"It's perfectly ridiculous, Mr. Kent, and I'm sure you'll explain it to him — I'm so glad there's a man here — I wasn't really driving fast, of course — and they always take advantage of a woman — how *could* I go fast with Adelaide's poor head and all that, you know — I suppose they think they can blackmail us, or some such horrid thing, and I think it's perfectly tyrannical — I couldn't hold in the ponies, you know; their mouths are as hard as a stone — and I don't see how this awful city is gov-

erned — I'm sure I'd give them a piece of my mind if they brought me into any of their absurd courts — to treat a lady in such an abominable way; and if I ever go out again without a groom I'll have myself put into a lunatic asylum — I wish you'd speak to him yourself, Mr. Kent — and if I can't take a lady home — sick, too — without being arrested and sent to State's prison — I think it's perfectly tyrannical!"

And here Mrs. Smith paused, being on the verge of tears and quite out of breath. The policeman waited passively until she was silent; but he did not relax his grasp on the nearest pony's rein.

"I seen the leddy, sorr," he said, "a-comin' down the avenyer licketty-split, a whippin' of them ponies like —"

"It's false!" sobbed Mrs. Smith.

"I'll tek me gospel oat' to it, sorr; an' the captain's very partickler an' severe agin fast drivin' anywhere widin the precinc', an' on the avenyer in special."

"How long ago was this?" Kent inquired.

"Near the full of an hour, sorr. I follied them sharp; there was another leddy with her; but I couldn't catch on to them, an' it was only by good luck I seen her comin' back slow-like, an' called to her for to stop."

"Can't this be arranged?" asked Kent in a low voice.

The policeman replied in the same tone.

"I'd like to oblige ye, sorr, but it can't be done,

The Captain seen her; he was a-comin' down the street himself; and 'twud be the worth of my place on the for-r-ce."

Kent saw that he had to deal with a new man.

"There's nothing to be done," he said to Mrs. Smith, "but to go quietly with the officer. I will accompany you; and I don't think there will be any trouble when we once get to the — the place."

"I'll go to the Market with ye, av ye say," suggested the policeman, who was inclined to be civil to the quiet gentleman with the air of authority: "ye'll not find annyone there at this hour, most like; but av ye know annyone, ye might send."

Kent knew several of the justices; and he hailed this proposition with satisfaction.

"Now," he said to Mrs. Smith, "drive along with us to the police-court. We will walk a little ahead of you, so as not to attract attention. And see that you *do* follow!" he added, in a lower tone of warning.

"I will be responsible for this lady's following us," he went on to the policeman, and the three set out for the Jefferson Market Court.

On the way Kent questioned the officer, and learned that Mrs. Smith had been seen driving at a dangerously rapid rate down Fifth Avenue about an hour before. Another lady was with her. It was not a case of runaway horses. The two lazy, over-fed little ponies were being pushed to the limit of their speed, and Mrs. Smith had used the whip with the thoughtless freedom of an excited woman.

"Sure, they'll cry out if a man flicks a fly off the ear av a hoss," observed the policeman; "but they'll bate the hide off the baste thimselves if they tek the whip in their hands."

They were not long in reaching the court. The outer doors, by some happy chance, were open, and a few shabby men were lounging about. One man of rather gaudy attire, with a diamond pin in his dirty shirt, stood smoking a bad cigar on the highest step. He looked at Kent and nodded, glancing at his companions. Kent went up to him and spoke for a moment.

The man inclined his head to listen, and then nodded again, and shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth.

"Cert'nly, Mr. Kent, of course — glad to oblige you or any friend of yours. Come along."

"Come," whispered Kent to Mrs. Smith, and they went under the Gothic archway, up a winding flight of stairs, and through a huge dark room with a lofty ceiling, and into a little bleak-looking chamber with one window, a desk, a chair, and two cuspidors.

Mrs. Smith sank into a chair; she was much frightened now, and voluble indignation had deserted her. State's prison loomed before her, and she felt that she was already in the very depths of social degradation.

She scarcely knew what was going on. The man with the diamond pin seated himself behind the desk; the policeman said something in a low voice and with an obsequious manner. Mrs. Smith sup-

posed that he was telling his side of the story; but she had no longer the courage to rise and contradict him. Then the strange man asked a few questions, and then Kent made some remark, and the very sound of his voice cheered the hapless prisoner up. Then there was a little confused conversation, of which she understood nothing, and then the man with the diamond pin said, loudly and carelessly, —

"All right!"

He threw a book and some papers into a drawer of the desk, and rose. Mrs. Smith rose also, and Kent led her up to the stranger.

"Mrs. Smith," he said, "this is Judge Mulvaney, who has just passed on your little case."

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady in vague terror.

"It's all right, mum," said the Judge, who had a marked Irish accent. "As I understand it, your ponies run away with ye. It frequently happens. I'm sorry ye were put to any inconvenience. And it's well for ye ye had a friend like Mr. Kent at hand to look out for ye, or it might 'a' been all night in a station-house, which is disagreeable to any lady."

"It is fortunate that we found you here, Judge," said Kent politely. "Mrs. Smith, it is to Judge Mulvaney that you are indebted for your liberty."

"Oh, I'm at liberty then, am I?" cried Mrs. Smith, suddenly recovering her self-possession; and she thanked the Judge most prettily, though her soul revolted against his shirt-cuffs and his diamonds.

The Judge deprecated any expression of gratitude. Any friend of Mr. Kent's was a friend of his, and he was only too happy to oblige a lady; and so, with mutual compliments, they parted.

"Who was that beast?" inquired Mrs. Smith, as Kent got into the phaeton by her side.

"That beast was a police justice."

"And what were you all doing all that time?"

"That was a trial, or rather an examination. It was held in the Judge's private office, and it resulted in your honorable discharge."

"Did he discharge me for your sake?"

"Well, yes."

"Is he a friend of yours — that horrid creature?"

"That horrid creature did you a good turn."

"I know — but is he really a friend of yours?"

"No, not exactly."

"Then why was he so ready to oblige you?"

"Well," laughed Kent, "the reason was not wholly unconnected with professional matters."

"Do you mean that it was because you are a journalist?"

"Perhaps."

There was a pause.

"Will my name be in the papers?"

"No."

"You're absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely."

"How good you are to me!"

"Not at all."

"Oh, but you are."

Kent did not reply for a moment. Then he turned upon his companion.

"*I* want to ask some questions now," he said: "why were you driving so fast?"

"I wasn't—"

"Oh, yes, you were."

"Well, Adelaide was in such a hurry to get home."

"But Adelaide lives on Gramercy Park. What were you doing down here?"

"I was going to see Faith Ruthven."

"But Adelaide was with you."

"Well," cried Mrs. Smith, driven to desperation, "I was only going to leave a message at Faith's door that I wanted to see her to-morrow, and then I was going back to pass the evening with Adelaide; and I very inconsiderately asked her to let me drive first to the Ruthvens', and she felt so much better when she got down to Twelfth Street that she got out and said she would walk back and take the blue cars at Fourteenth Street; and that's all there is to it, and there's no mystery about it, and you needn't be so queer and suspicious!"

Mrs. Smith felt herself fairly safe after this deliverance. Of course Kent could not go to the Ruthvens' and ask the servants if she had called there. He must rest content with this explanation, which, indeed, was the best she had to offer him. Adelaide had, as she said, left her at Twelfth Street, and had told a superfluous little fib about going home in the blue cars, although it was tacitly understood

between the two women that Adelaide was about to do nothing of the sort, and Mrs. Smith had been given to understand that if she drove slowly down the Avenue to Washington Square and back, she would meet her companion where they had parted. And in justice to Mrs. Smith, it must be owned that she had no knowledge whatever of Adelaide's mission. Even her dramatic soul would have recoiled from such a dangerous scheme.

Whether Kent was satisfied or unsatisfied, he made no sign; but changed the subject, deftly set Mrs. Smith to talking, and played a silent, though not wholly attentive part, on the way home.

But, like the fabled simian, the quiet, undemonstrative man who sat in the pony-phaeton by the side of the fascinating young widow, thought, all the more for his deceptive silence, of what he had seen and heard; and he was thinking of it still as he walked down Fifth Avenue about eleven o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER XII.

A MESSENGER.

AT that same pleasant hour of eleven, the sun fell on the brown and white awnings that shaded the windows of Mr. Ruthven's "living-room" from the glare of day. A faint light filtered through, and made a dusky radiance at the end of the long apartment. This soft illumination fell upon Mr. Ruthven, seated in a very easy chair, reading his morning paper, and upon Faith, pale and languid, stretched upon a lounge that filled the large central bay-window.

Mr. Ruthven looked up from his paper once or twice, and stirred uneasily in his seat. Faith did not move. There was no noise in the room except what was made by a meek and highly efficient servant who was removing the remains of the late breakfast.

Ruthven waited until this humble part of the household machinery was gone from the room; then coughed a gentle preliminary cough, and said, —

"Faith, my love!"

His tone was sweetly paternal; but there was a suggestion of gall in the honey.

Faith did not move as she answered, —

"Papa."

"I trust you are no worse?"

"I am better, papa," she answered wearily; "but I feel a little weak and nervous yet."

Mr. Ruthven paused for a moment. There were times when even his fine man-of-the-world tact was at a loss.

"My dear," he said, "I don't quite understand how you came to be taken so ill last night."

"I told you, papa," said Faith, with the same weary voice.

"Yes, I know, my dear," he returned with a slight contraction of his delicate brows; "but it seems very strange. You appear to forget that it made me very nervous to wake up from my little nap and not to find you."

"It was inconsiderate, papa," she answered, raising herself on her elbow, and turning a dull white face toward him; "but I did not wish to disturb you, and I felt that I must have the fresh air. I expected to be back before you were awake. I hope you are not angry."

She rose and walked slowly to his side, and laid her hand upon his shoulder. He gave a half-glance up in her face, and then his eyes dropped, and he went on, with a touch of irritation in his voice which suggested that some finer fibre was touched, and that the sensation annoyed him.

"Er — no," he said, "not angry, my dear, but pained — yes, pained. You are so unconventional,

Faith, and — er — *odd*, you know — unlike other girls of your age. It was really not at all the thing, just because you felt a little faint or nervous, to run away into the street in that extraordinary fashion."

"I *couldn't* help it," cried Faith with a feeling which her voice had not expressed before.

"You only made yourself worse. I don't know what Mr. Kent must have thought of you."

Faith made a little involuntary movement at this speech; but her father appeared not to have noticed it, and went on, half querulously:

"He can't be accustomed to escorting home young ladies who faint in the streets. It is very fortunate, however, that it *was* Mr. Kent. Really, I should have been positively vexed if it had been any one else — that fellow Carnegie, for instance. Carnegie — ah, yes, I suppose that explains it."

Faith started at this, beyond all concealment. But her father's tone was quiet, and he was not looking at her.

"The smell of the — er — paint," he continued: "the fellow kept you so long in his studio — vulgar, hodge-podge sort of place, too — looking at his — er — 'Lear' — that I have no doubt it made you ill. I noticed that you looked pale when you left the room. Horribly ill-bred of him. You mustn't go to those studios again, my dear."

He was watching her now, but he saw nothing. Her face was calm as she replied, —

"I shall not, papa. I think I will go to my room

and lie down for a while. I shall not see you again before you go out."

"Very well, my dear," said Mr. Ruthven as he rose, with the frown deepening on his brow; "I hope you will be better by luncheon-time."

He looked at his daughter as she went slowly out of the room, and when he had listened till the last rustle of her dress died away, he clasped his hands behind his back and walked up and down the room. He wore a look of anxiety and perplexity that strangely disturbed his placid features.

"I must see Kent," he thought. He had no positive, formulated suspicion that there was anything really wrong behind his daughter's strange conduct; but the mere fact that her conduct was strange troubled him beyond measure. Conventional propriety was the very foundation of the man's social religion, and any offence against it shocked him as blasphemy or impiety shocks a sectarian fanatic. He was a man who could have pardoned any of the errors of youthful rakishness to an otherwise "eligible" son-in-law; but the bare thought that his daughter had done something which was in bad taste for a well-brought-up young woman caused him a keen and genuine pain.

Of course he could form no guess as to what had really occurred. But he could not bring himself to believe that Faith had felt ill the previous evening, had gone out to breathe the fresh sir, and had been found by Mr. Kent in a half-fainting condition.

It was all very simple and natural, but he did

not believe it. Made up of affectations though he was, there was no sham about the delicacy of Mr. Ruthven's spiritual quality. He could be blind to many things obvious to men of coarser grain; convention had made him obtuse to new impressions, and had dwarfed his character in many ways; but he was still keenly sensitive and susceptible to such influences as his training allowed of. A look, a word, a tone, was as good as the broadest of suggestions to this shrewd, subtle, cultivated mind, and some faint atmosphere of mystery hanging about an otherwise commonplace little incident had excited his vague suspicion.

And yet this same quick and receptive temperament had not laid his soul open to the power of his daughter's sweet and pure presence, that might have inspired far grosser men with a perfect trust and confidence in her. As he walked from end to end of the room, he was in a mood to believe in almost any indiscretion on the part of the poor child who was trying to sleep, or, at least, not to think, in the shadowy silence of her bedroom.

There came a knock at the door, and a servant entered. Ruthven had his hand on the bell at the moment.

"A letter for Miss Ruthven, sir," said the man, presenting it; "there is an answer."

"Miss Ruthven is lying down, and must not be disturbed."

"The man was very anxious for an answer, sir," insisted the servant

"Do you know from whom it comes?" asked Ruthven, turning the envelope over in his hands.

"No, sir; the man didn't say; but I think he's some kind of an actor-man, sir."

"Who, the bearer?"

"Yes, sir; he looks as though he'd come out of a play."

"Oh!" cried Mr. Ruthven, suddenly enlightened: "peculiar person, eh? What does he look like — an old man — Lear?"

"No, sir; it's more like a brigand he is."

"A brigand?"

"With a big hat, sir, and a feather in it, and powerful ferocious. He called me your varlet, sir —"

Ruthven checked him.

"Send the man here. And — John, my liqueur."

The servant disappeared. Ruthven gazed hard at the letter in his hands.

"That would tell me," he thought; "but, confound it, it's too nasty a business even to think of opening other people's letters."

The very fact that such a vulgarly dishonorable thought had entered his mind disturbed him, and he threw the letter on the table and resumed his uneasy walk, until Megilp entered with the true cavalier stride.

"Ha, Magee, is that you?" Mr. Ruthven greeted him, absentmindedly.

"Megilp's me name, and at your service, sir!" responded the messenger, giving forth his words

with that cadence with which blank verse was of yore delivered in the Old Bowery.

Ruthven looked at him searchingly.

"Ah, yes," he said slowly; "sit down, Mr. Megilp."

Megilp seated himself, but not before making provision for the proper stowage of an imaginary sword.

"Be me troth, I'm aweary!" he observed.

"You've had a hot walk, I'm afraid?" Mr. Ruthven inquired, amiably.

"'Faith, and a dusty."

"Very busy at the — er — studio?"

"A Fool and a Roman Emperor yesterday," summarized Megilp; "and to-day — you see."

With an expressive gesture he directed attention to his pose, and more particularly to his waistcoat.

"Ah, yes," said the elderly gentleman with a careless glance; "Briggs told me you were a very successful brigand."

"Brigand! brigand, said he?" cried Megilp, rising in anger; "I'll teach the saucy knave!"

He clapped his hand upon his left hip, and became suddenly conscious of the fact that he was not in very truth a sword-bearer.

"'Tis well!" he muttered, in a half-sheepish attempt to recover his dignity; "it seems this thing has not entirely took."

He looked uncomfortably at the master of the house; but Ruthven had not deigned to notice this theatrical outburst. His delicate, small features

had taken on a hard and unpleasant look of resolution. He stood by the table in the centre of the room, toying with some glasses which the servant had just brought in upon a tray, together with a flask of Curaçoa.

Suddenly he spoke, sharply and coldly:

"You can't deliver your letter at present. Miss Ruthven is — er — engaged. Is it important? Will you wait?"

Megilp's respone was full of dignity.

"I hardly think, sir, that Mr. Carnegie would have despatched *me* with a mission of trivial import."

"Will you wait?" demanded Ruthven shortly.

"Yes!" answered Megilp, still more shortly.

"Are you permanently engaged to Mr. Carnegie?" was Mr. Ruthven's next question as he rang the bell.

"I am permanently wedded to art," Megilp informed him in stately tones.

"Will you be — er — so good as to answer my question?"

The servant entered as he spoke, and, in obedience to a whispered direction, brought from the sideboard a full-sized tumbler, which he placed on the tray by the side of the fragile little liqueur glasses.

When he was gone again, Megilp answered Mr. Ruthven's question with profound deliberation and unruffled dignity:

"I will answer you, sir. I have been inspiration to Mr. Carnegie for ten years, barring one brief period of infidelity, when I left him to go on the

stage. Hereafter, no more false gods in mine. I will stick to him so long as he will permit me to stick, be me halidome!"

Mr. Ruthven's haughty tone had utterly vanished when he turned around and spoke to Megilp. He assumed that manner in which he was wont to address an inferior whom he desired to honor. It was a delightful blending of natural condescension with a studied and half-restrained familiarity, which he had found most serviceable with the lower classes. It encouraged them to open their hearts, while it did not so intoxicate their minds with a false sense of importance as to lead them to presume on their position.

"Let me give you some — er — wine, Mr. Megilp. You must be fatigued."

The change was sudden, but it was complete. Megilp was surprised, but satisfied.

"I do thirst — some," he remarked, feeling once more quite at his ease.

"It's a very light, harmless wine," his host observed, handing him the tumbler nearly full of fragrant Curaçoa; "don't be afraid of it."

"Troth, I fear it not!" and Megilp tossed off half the glass at a draught. Then he smacked his lips and looked rather doubtfully at the rest of the liquor. He had certainly never tasted genuine Curaçoa before; but his experience in the coarser stimulants was large, and he recognized a subtle pungency in the cloying drink which suggested its kinship to stronger distillations than "light, harmless wines."

Still it was certainly very good, and he felt no particular inclination to question the truth of Mr. Ruthven's airy recommendation. He finished the tumblerful with another sip.

"Let me give you some more," his entertainer pressed; "you find it rather thin, don't you?"

Megilp took this as an implied reflection on his knowledge of the potables of the fashionable world. He answered, loftily, —

"I am familiar with the nectar, sir."

"You know it?" Ruthven was somewhat surprised.

"We have painted it frequently, sir, in still-lifes. Only then it generally took the form of Indian-red and sepia and water."

"This is more inspiring, eh?" Ruthven smiled; "have another?"

The first was already mounting to Megilp's head.

"It warms the cockles of me heart!" he cried, and the spirit of the cavaliers began to swell within his breast: "give me wine" — and he gulped down half a tumblerful more — "wine and woman and song — only, somehow, I never could get a tune right. That's the true cavalier's life. Here's your health, sir, and one for Prince Charley — the boy for the lads and the lasses!"

The poor fellow really felt himself, for the moment, one of the historic class represented to him by his gaudy vest and the feather in his hat. Scraps of desultory reading, unguided burrowings in Carnegie's small yet thoroughly eclectic library, were floating

through his head. He had picked up a good deal of knowledge of all that was picturesque in history, and the strong liqueur helped him to identify himself in spirit with a certain vague conception which haunted him of a dashing, jovial, devil-may-care creature with flowing locks and curled moustaches, clad in doublet and broad collar and beribboned breeches and mighty boots, a meteor with fair moustache and chin-tuft, who flashed bright-sworded through a battle-shaken epoch that came somewhere between Sir Walter Raleigh's time of ruff and cape and pointed beard, and the shaven days of tight knee-breeches and Good Queen Anne.

Ruthven stood regarding him with a look that would have been merely quizzical and cynical had it not been for an underlying show of malign determination.

"And Prince Jack!" he drawled, meaningly.

"Prince Jack?" repeated Megilp, puzzled.

"Yes, Prince Jack. He's a boy for the lads and lasses, too, is he not?"

"I take you not."

"Prince Jack Carnegie — a fine, handsome young fellow! I suppose, if you were not the soul of discretion, you could tell a tale or two of him."

Even as he spoke, Ruthven almost cursed himself for the facility with which he found he could carry out his own plan. Scarcely with his own volition, his voice and his phrase caught the infection of Megilp's assumption, and encourage the infatuated model by delicately ministering to his delusion. It

was bad enough, it seemed to this fastidious schemer, to stoop to intoxicate a servant for the purpose of getting information from him; but to lower one's self to playing an opposite part to a half-drunken model with a theatrical mania was indeed a degradation.

"Devil the tale!" Megilp answered him; adding apologetically, "an it please your honor."

"Come, come, don't tell me that. No pretty models, eh?"

Mr. Ruthven here caught himself about to wink, and felt still more ashamed of himself, although he would not have owned, even to his conscience, that the uncomfortable sensation that troubled him was simple, vulgar shame.

Megilp's reply showed that he felt at once the liquor and his own importance:

"I'd have you know, sir, I serve no pot-house gallant. Pretty models are not in our style!"

"But Mr. Carnegie's profession —"

"My Lord of Carnegie, sir, follows not the calling of house and sign painter, fresco and interior decorations. We are artists, sir, and we never forget the dignity of art, even in our relaxations."

"Then you do have relaxations?" the other inquired eagerly.

"We do, sir, at times. But nothing plebeian — never, sir."

"Aristocratic loveliness, for instance?" cried Ruthven, coming to an end of his finesse.

"Aristocratic loveliness, sir; but not 'for instance.' Instances I know not."

Ruthven had carried through his difficult and distasteful experiment only to make a complete failure at the end. When it came to the critical point, he had touched the one chord in Megilp's soul which neither wine nor his own crazy conceits could dull — the chord of loyalty to a master who, often careless and hot-tempered, was ever a master in that best sense of the word which implies the power and will to protect and care for the servant. Megilp had eaten Jack Carnegie's bread for ten years while Carnegie was a rich amateur and while he was a poor artist, and he knew that his loving service had given him a claim upon his employer's affection which allied him closely, in a certain sense, with a man who had the power of superior intelligence, education, fortune and social position. It was something of a dog's love for his owner with which he loved Jack; but the feeling that is noble in a dog is surely not ignoble in a man's breast. Megilp would have to be very drunk indeed before he betrayed Jack Carnegie.

"I think you had better not wait for your answer," said Ruthven, his tone once more lofty and severe.

"Methinks you're right," answered Megilp, rising to his feet, conscious of a thick utterance and a gyratory instability in all things about him; "I'll leave me missive with you. Give ye good den, sir."

He steadied himself for a moment, marched with swaying dignity to the door, got over the threshold with a jerk, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRICK AND A TURNING-POINT.

HE left Ruthven to ponder over this little scene; and Mr. Ruthven's pondering was far from pleasant. He felt morally nauseated when he reflected that he had yielded to what in his thoughts he characterized as a "cursed low" impulse. But what really distressed him was not the existence of the impulse, but the effect of his having allowed it to move him. He had done a thing that was in shockingly bad taste, however you looked at it. It was foolish, it was cheap, it was without precedent — no slight indictment, this last, in Mr. Ruthven's code. He felt like a high-caste Hindoo in urgent need of purification. He had stained and soiled his social character, and he longed, not for a thorough purgation, but for a luxurious ablution. But, alas! the laws of modern society offer no easy yet satisfying atonement for him who sins against the unwritten canons. He must cover up his sin under his broadcloth and fine linen, and conceal it from the world, and try to look as though he did not feel spiritually dirty.

It must be said again that Mr. Ruthven's finical re-

morse concerned itself wholly with his ungentlemanly deeds, and made no account whatever of a certain base thought which grew as it dwelt within his mind. He could not directly connect Megilp's faithful discretion with the cause of his own suspicions; but the bare fact that he had been baffled in his attempt at investigation seemed to make greater the urgency of that investigation. From doubting the good, he passed to believing in the bad. He was now convinced that there was a mystery which it was his right — to himself he called it his duty — as a parent, to clear up at any cost.

He looked at the letter on the table and tried to quiet his nerves with a second glass of Curaçoa. It had been his custom for many years to take a drop of liqueur in the morning — he always referred to it as his "cocktail," on the same principle on which he named this masculine boudoir his "living-room" — but never to his recollection had he twice filled the tiny glass on the same day. He made an attempt to finish his morning paper, and failed. Then he tiptoed to his daughter's room, pushed open the unlocked door, and, looking in, saw that she was really asleep upon her bed.

Perhaps from kindness, perhaps because of his sensitive shrinking from a "scene," he forbore to wake her, and went away, to busy himself among his collections and his bric-à-brac, which this day proved powerless to distract his mind from the ugly thought which was preying upon it.

The Ruthvens' luncheon-hour was two; that is,

Mr. Ruthven, who breakfasted on a little fruit and a cup of coffee, felt an appetite for half a quail or a little salmon, or some small delicacy of the sort. Faith, whose morning meal was more hearty, merely sat opposite her father at this repast, and played her part of mistress of the house in the pretty way that pleased the old epicure. To-day, when Mr. Ruthven's brook-trout were placed upon the table, he sent a servant to his daughter's room, who returned with the report that she was still asleep — which was not wonderful, considering that the poor child had not closed her eyes the night before.

So her father sat him down alone, and dissected one fish daintily with his fork, and decided that he did not care to eat it, and sent it away. After that, the domestic despatched once more to Miss Ruthven's apartment came back with the report that she was dressing and would appear before long.

Her father prepared himself for the discharge of his paternal duty by drinking a very small glass of wine, of which, to tell the truth, he had absolute need; for his stomach was uncommonly qualmish. Mr. Ruthven felt almost all the great emotions of life in their re-action upon the stomach.

But before Faith had finished her dressing for the afternoon, there was a ring at the door, and the servant brought up Mr. Robert Swift's card for Miss Ruthven. Mr. Swift was in the reception-room.

Mr. Ruthven swore under his breath, and then a queer look came over his face.

"Take this card to Miss Ruthven," he said; "tell

her that Mr. Swift is down-stairs, and that when he is gone, I should like to see her — no hurry — at her leisure. And — er — by the way," he added, as the servant was leaving the room, "tell Miss Ruthven that I have a note for her, from Mr. Carnegie, I believe."

Then he moistened his dry lips with his tongue, and stood anxiously watching the door. He found the time long while he waited, and yet it seemed suspiciously short when Faith entered and approached him.

"You came for the letter!" he burst out.

"For the letter?" said Faith, startled.

"Yes — for Mr. Carnegie's letter — you could not wait!"

"I thought there might be an answer," the girl faltered.

"You knew there *must* be an answer! Don't deceive me, Faith. You have been concealing something from me. But I must know all now."

"Father — what do you mean?"

"Don't attempt any denial. This letter —" and he showed it to her; "I have —"

"You have not opened it?" she cried with wide-open eyes and white cheeks.

"Yes," he said, desperately; "now tell me the rest."

There was a moment of silence.

"I will tell you nothing if you have opened my letter."

"Well, I have not." His excited and expectant

manner changed to one of uneasy petulance. "There it is. But — "

"*But*," she said, as she took it, and looked at him with something in her girl's eyes which he had never seen there before, "*but* you were willing to use it to play me a trick like this! Oh father, father!"

She threw the unopened letter on the table, and sat down and hid her face in her hands. Ruthven fidgeted about for a moment, and then she spoke again.

"Very well," she said, "I will tell you what you wish to know. One month ago I promised Mr. Carnegie that I would marry him."

"What!"

"Yesterday," she went on, in a low, quiet voice, "I did him a wrong. I was cruel and mistrustful. I went to his studio in the evening, not to see him, but to leave a message for him — a message of — love, that I would not trust to any other person."

"You went to Mr. Carnegie's studio!"

"I have told you why."

"But your nervousness — your illness when you came home — you cannot explain *that!*"

Faith had sunk into a seat, and seemed to be meditating over an answer. Her expression showed that she was not seeking for words, but rather considering how much or how little of the truth she was willing to tell.

Ruthven stood and watched her. His astonishment, his horror, his disgust, all resolved themselves

into a sensation of cold and acute gastric disturbance. Yet his suffering was real, after its kind. He had received a blow none the less severe that it served principally to shatter a poor structure of worldly hopes and ambitions. He had been a good father according to his feeble lights, mere flickerings of the lamp that guided his feet along the pathway of propriety. He might be selfish at heart, but he had always been generous in deed. No man could have been more indulgent, more liberal in things material. He had never neglected his motherless daughter; he had always striven, in very truth, to make her forget that she was motherless, and it was beyond his power to comprehend that this was not wholly the wisest plan to pursue, and that there are some griefs of which nature never intended that we should be robbed.

He had hoped for Faith all that his social creed recognized as best in this world — distinction, power and popularity in the favored class to which she belonged. He had hoped to see her happily married to a son-in-law of whom he could approve, and it had always been, in his plans, as important that the marriage should be happy as that the husband should be worthy of his approbation. Perhaps his standard of happiness was low; perhaps he could have understood no happiness that did not drive in a carriage, with Wealth for a coachman and Pedigree to open the door; but he felt himself so far from the tyrannical parent of the sensation novel that he was cruelly wounded when he learned from her own lips that his

daughter had betrothed herself to a Bohemian renegade from good society.

And yet this grief — a galling and abiding misery — seemed at the instant a slight thing beside the fact that his daughter had committed an "indiscretion," had done something which, however harmless in itself, was an offence against the canons of her world.

He waited for her justification as though she had really to vindicate her character from a criminal folly.

"No," she said at last, "I cannot." She spoke with deliberation and a careful choice of her words, which forced him to recognize a new element of strength in her character. "I can only tell you this. Neither last night, nor at any other time, have I done anything that I should be ashamed to own to you. If I am keeping a secret from you now, it is the first secret of my life, and I keep it because it is not mine alone."

"Whose, then?"

"I cannot tell you."

"*His?* Carnegie's — this man you want to marry?"

Her lip quivered, but her voice was calm and even when she spoke.

"I shall never marry Mr. Carnegie — now."

"Why not?"

The hard insistency of his questioning tortured her. She cried, excitedly, —

"Don't ask me, father!"

"No, I will not ask you," he said, breathing hard, and beginning once more to walk up and down the room. "You have deceived me — deceived me doubly. You have betrayed the — er — confidence I placed in you, and you have entirely disregarded my wishes in making an engagement of which you knew I should disapprove. You need say no more — nothing more whatever — of what happened last night. I don't wish you to attempt to tell me anything more. I shall not believe you. I will learn the whole truth from the — er — *fancé* whom you are ashamed to acknowledge."

The imputation on her truth brought his daughter to her feet, with some tinge of color in her pale cheeks.

"You are wrong! I am not ashamed to acknowledge him! You know it!"

Then the quick red faded out, and her eyes filled, and there was a sob in her voice as she said, —

"But I am ashamed of my father, who doubts me, and has not one kind word for me in my misery!"

The pathetic and unconventional force of her speech touched Ruthven for a second. He looked at her and hesitated in his speech.

"Faith — I — I —" then his eyes fell on the letter upon the table. "If I am to believe you, show me that letter."

There is often one fatal word in a quarrel which clouds in an instant the dawning light of reconciliation or understanding. Ruthven had spoken the word. He felt, as he looked at Faith, standing

erect, with flashing eyes that looked him full in the face, that his daughter was his daughter no more. John Carnegie's promised wife she might be, but never more the clinging and dependent girl who had lived all her life in the shadow of her father's perfect and infallible knowledge of the world. He was dealing with a woman who would judge for herself, by her own standard of right and wrong, her duties and her privileges.

"Would you have me clear myself in that way?" she asked, boldly. "I do not know what is in that letter. I know that no one has the right to open it except myself. And I know that if there is a secret in it, it is neither yours nor mine. If you open it, I shall never think of you as my father again."

And she was gone, and had left the letter lying upon the table.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHAMPION.

RUTHVEN picked up the unopened letter, and went slowly out of the door by which his daughter had disappeared. There was a blank, almost childish expression of bewilderment upon his face. He was trying to realize that Faith had actually spoken to him the words which rang in his ears.

"I shall never think of you as my father again."

He betook himself to his room, thinking over that sentence, so absorbed that he did not even ask himself in which direction the girl had gone. He quite forgot that Swift was in the reception-room. Perhaps this was the first time in his life that he had been unmindful of what he would have called the *convenances*.

The door of Mr. Ruthven's apartment had scarcely closed behind him when there was a ring at the bell, a sound of hurrying feet upon the stairs, and, as the hall-door opened and shut again, Mr. Robert Swift hastily wheeled around the turn of the balusters at the top of the first flight. Just out of the range of sight of a person standing below, he paused

and listened. He heard a familiar voice in brief colloquy with the servant who came up-stairs after closing the door of the reception-room upon the new visitor. Mr. Swift was moving toward the door of the "living-room" when he heard another ring. He looked over the balusters once more. Another servant went to the door and let in a gentleman, who, in the act of inquiring if Miss Ruthven were in, glanced up and saw Mr. Swift's head thrust imprudently forward.

"I will go up-stairs," said Mr. Kent in the tone of one who does not mean to ask permission.

The servant — not the regular attendant at the door — looked surprised, but offered no objection. None would have availed, for Kent calmly ascended the stairs, and followed Swift into the front room.

"What the deuce are you doing here, Kent?" Mr. Swift inquired.

"What the deuce are *you* doing here?"

"I came here to see Miss Ruthven."

"Oh," said Kent, looking grim; "you came here to see Miss Ruthven. Did you run up-stairs here to see Miss Ruthven?"

Swift looked at his friend and hesitated for an answer. He was always a little afraid of Kent, and generally very much afraid of Kent's anger. For this fear he had excellent reason. Kent never troubled himself about trifles, and he had an awe-inspiring faculty for being righteous and terrible in his wrath. He was no respecter of persons. Lies were of no use in dealing with him; his keen, pre-

cise, lawyer-like intellect penetrated every sham; and if poor Swift, conscious of constant wrong-doing, dreaded two things upon this earth, those two things were his wife's inspired guesses and Kent's determined cross-examinations. The two men had been friends since their first youth, they had been companions in the varied amusements in which young men indulge themselves; but neither friendship nor companionship could offset the inequality of their mental equipment. It was a tyranny of one brain over the other, which both understood, though they did not acknowledge it. Swift's spirit rebelled secretly and impotently, but his rebellion never took a more overt form than a petulant protest, when he was pushed to the wall, against being "bullied." He always yielded when Kent undertook to discipline him, and he always came to Kent for advice when any of his minor sins found him out. As to Kent, he had a contemptuous liking for the comrade of his youthful days; something such a feeling as the head of a great house might entertain for a charming scapegrace nephew; and, in so far as the essentials of manly friendship went, was ever discreet and devoted, and smoothed out or covered up small unpleasantnesses and administered lectures of more or less severity with much tact and cleverness.

But on this occasion Swift saw by the look in Kent's eyes that there was something more to be expected than the very constrained remonstrance which alone one man can address to another. Poor

Bob did not quite know what he had done to deserve what he saw coming, but he foresaw a terrific explosion. And although he put on a bold front, and although he was, in one sense, not afraid of anything that any man could say or do to him, yet in his soul he cowered before Kent's glance, for he had a half-superstitious idea that the very Fates frowned when Kent's brows contracted.

"My wife's in the reception-room," he said sulkily, and then felt angry with himself for having given this explanation, like a school-boy before his inquisitorial teacher.

"I know your wife is there. She came in just before I did."

"Yes, I saw her coming — saw her through the window. So I skipped up here in lively style."

"Oh, you skipped up here in lively style? *Why* did you skip up here in lively style?"

These repetitions were a refined cruelty which Swift's mentor greatly affected in his cross-examinations. Swift knew them of old, but just at this moment there was a delusive calm about Kent's voice that led his friend to believe himself mistaken in his first estimate of the situation.

"Well, of course," he said in a confidential way, "I didn't care to have her see me here."

"Why not?"

This was not an easy question to answer.

"Well, you know she would wonder why I was here."

"Why *are* you here?"

To save his life Swift could not have answered this question. In fact, he now asked it of himself for the first time. Why was he there? Looking into his own mind, he found what he thought a very complicated state of things. But there was nothing complicated about his thoughts or his emotions. His views were vague, that was all. He did not mean to do anything dishonorable, but he meant to gratify that idle and vain curiosity which is at the bottom of half the dishonorable deeds done in this world. The man had got into his head the diabolical idea that Faith Ruthven cared for him. It was absurd, it was shameful; but it was there. And although he had had more than his share of flirtations and love-affairs, before and after marriage, and although his boundless self-conceit had stomach for all his many successes, he recognized in this tribute to his charms something so infinitely superior in quality to any of the easy conquests, among a certain class of women, which fall to the lot of a handsome and attractive man, that it fanned his egotism into something like the fire of insanity. Not even his wife's fervent passion in the first of its freshness had so subtly flattered his vanity as the bare thought that this exquisitely pure and proud young girl had fallen in love with him unsolicited. Yet he had loved Adelaide, and he did not even pretend to himself that he loved Faith; he had moved heaven and earth to make Adelaide his wife, and he knew perfectly well that he wanted absolutely nothing of Faith.

He would have been sincerely indignant and sincerely hurt had he been accused of even wishing to violate that canon of his very lax moral code which forbade him, a married man, to trifle with the affections of a young girl of his own world; yet the foolish fancy that Faith cared for him had so intoxicated his self-love that he could not refrain from seeking some assurance of the delicious truth. He wanted this assurance for himself alone; he would have guarded it with jealous care; he had no thought of making any evil use of it — but he wanted it, and for the moment he forgot that if his belief were true, it was matter for mourning and not for self-gratulation.

But if Swift did not understand his own mind, he certainly knew that there was nothing in it which he cared to reveal to Cecil Kent. He did *not* know, however, how he was to avoid some unpleasant revelations. The situation in which he found himself admitted of no reasonable explanation. He had no business where he was; he had no excuse to offer for his presence. He was practically in hiding from his wife. He had done a stupid thing, perhaps, in running up-stairs; but he had acted upon a very natural impulse. He had returned to his house the night before at three o'clock. When he had awoke, at noon, Adelaide was already out. He knew her well enough to be sure that she would give vent to some deplorable expression of anger if she met him for the first time while he was making a call — especially a call which had so little urgency

as this one. He had seen Miss Ruthven yesterday, and he had not seen his own wife since her illness. And whether his flight was wise or foolish, he had certainly flown from Mrs. Swift's presence, and now stood face to face with Kent, called to account on two indictments.

Of course Kent had no right to call him to account. But Kent had called him to account. And if it had been the veriest stranger, instead of Kent, the matter would have been equally awkward.

There are some questions that answer themselves.

Yet this was the only ground, Swift felt, upon which he could make any show of fight.

"Look here, Kent," he cried, "I'm cursed if I'll stand this insulting tone of yours. What business have you to question me? What business is it of yours what my relations are with my wife?"

"I don't care anything about your relations with your wife," returned Kent, not to be led away upon this side-issue. "I want to know why you are in this house at all?"

"And what right have you to ask me that?"

"Anybody and everybody's right," Kent said, as usual laying his finger at once upon the weak point in Swift's case. "After what happened last night, you have no business whatever to follow Miss Ruthven up in this manner. What are you here for?"

"What are *you* here for?"

"To look after you."

Kent knew that he had no need to point out why he had a right to be in the Ruthvens' house when the other man had not. This brief answer goaded Swift into rage, and he proceeded to make the explanation himself.

"Oh, yes, I understand you! Because you're a Bayard — a holy soul without reproach, you can come here. And because I'm a disreputable Lothario I can't come here without being suspected of iniquitous plans. That's your idea, is it? Well, suppose I came here with just as chivalrous intentions as your own, eh? Suppose — "

Kent simply shook his head, and Swift lost all control of himself.

"Very well! Go to the devil with your infernal pragmatical impudence. I came here because I chose; and I have more reason to be here than you have."

He stopped, somewhat startled at finding how far he had gone in his anger. Kent stared at him with a profound astonishment that for the second took the place of anger — stared and then swore briefly, under his breath.

"I believe the infernal ass really thinks — "

He paused to select the proper words to frame his question.

"Is it possible," he demanded, "that you actually imagine for one instant that Miss Ruthven went to that room last night to meet you?"

Kent had really thought Swift incapable of such

folly. He could guess that Robert would take the coarsest view of Faith's appearance in the studio, but he had not contemplated this strange perversion of the truth.

Swift had put himself in a position from which he could not well draw back.

"Did she go there to meet you?" he asked.

"No!"

"Or Jack Carnegie?"

"No," Kent answered, in spite of himself.

"He didn't appear to think so, at least," went on Swift, pursuing his advantage: "I say, Kent—"

But he did not say anything further. Kent's hand fell upon his shoulder, and Kent's hard voice, not loud, but clear, fell threateningly upon his ears.

"I do not know for what reason Miss Ruthven went to the studio last night. But if ever out of your mouth I hear the ghost of a hint that she went there with any such intent as you seem to believe, I'll tear your miserable soul out of your miserable coxcomb carcass!"

Kent had never gone so far as this before, and Swift's fury rose to white heat.

"What do you mean—" he cried, raising his voice.

Kent squelched him in an instant by an exhibition of authority as unprecedented as his threat.

"Bob Swift, take your hat—there it is on the table. Your wife is in the reception-room, and the

door is closed. If you don't get past that room and into the street inside of three minutes, I'll open that door for a conversation with your wife."

The two men looked at each other, Kent with a cold and determined glance, Swift in consternation that he could not hide. Not even the menace of personal violence had startled him so much as this threat. Certainly it brought him no such fear. For he knew that Kent had him entirely in his power. Kent knew his life, or at least knew that portion of it which he wished to conceal. If Kent really meant to tell Mrs. Swift the tenth part of what he knew, the Swift family was as good as broken up, and Mr. Swift's imagination instantly pictured the wide-spreading results of the scandal which his wife would create when she once knew for a certainty what she had hitherto only suspected. And Kent looked as though he meant to carry out his threat.

"*What?*" gasped Bob. Was his friend — his companion — his fellow-sinner in the old days, going to violate that great law of loyalty between man and man which declares that every member of the sex shall conscientiously guard the intimate and iniquitous secrets of every member?

"Yes."

"You won't do it!"

"I will!"

There being but little doubt that Kent would do as he proposed, and no doubt whatever that he could, Swift came to terms at once. His anger

could not blind him to the fact that he was powerless against the weapon that his friend was ready to employ. His position was untenable — indeed, he had no position whatever when he came to think of it. Any little question of self-indulgence in a platonic flirtation was no longer worthy of consideration. Even if the words he had spoken in his rage had expressed a genuine conviction, he would have felt that the game was not worth the candle. As it was, he did not really believe what he had hinted at, and the only feeling in his mind at the moment was that he was on the edge of a bad scrape, and that Kent was behaving in a most outrageous, strange and unfriendly manner.

"You will give me away to my wife?" he asked, much more concerned about this terrible defection from the ranks of masculine solidarity than about the exciting cause.

"Under these circumstances, I will. You know well enough that I can."

Swift crossed to the table and took up his hat.

"I'm going;" he said, "but, Cecil Kent — you — you are acting like a — hog." He hesitated for the word, and when he found it, he uttered it with a sorrowful indignation that was sincere in its way. That a friend should resort, even in the worst of quarrels, to this extreme measure was to him all but incomprehensible.

Kent made no attempt to relieve himself of this severe condemnation. He waited quietly until Swift had descended the stairs and shut the hall-

door behind him, and then Miss Ruthven's champion, with a weary and anxious look on his face, walked down to the reception-room, and met at the door the servant who had let him in.

Miss Ruthven had sent word that she was ill and could not see Mr. Kent, but that she begged he would call the next day if he could. Mr. Kent informed the servant that he could and would, and then he entered the reception-room.

CHAPTER XV.

CHALLENGE.

HE found Mrs. Swift sitting close by the fireplace, her eyes fixed upon the flowers in the empty grate, and the brown-gloved fingers of her right hand playing nervously with the fringe of the mantel-cloth.

"Why don't they have parlors in this house?" she said, starting up at the sound of Kent's footsteps and facing him. "I mean parlors where one can wait. It always makes me fidgetty to sit in these little stived-up reception-rooms. And I've been waiting here I don't know how long."

"There is a large parlor down the hall," suggested Kent. "If you want space, you will find it there."

"Oh, yes, I know — it's about as cheerful as a tomb. I don't believe any mortal ever saw that room by daylight. Where's Faith?"

"That is more than I can tell you. Miss Ruthven has just sent word to me that she cannot see me."

"She sent word to me about half an hour ago that she would see me — in a few minutes. I

believe she's in bed yet. She certainly isn't attending to her household duties."

"If you will pardon the observation, the same appears to be the case with you."

"I won't pardon the observation. It is highly impertinent."

"Indeed? It struck me as being rather pertinent."

"Well, Mr. Kent, if that is the condition of your wit at this hour of the day, I will leave you and go and look for Faith."

"No, don't," said Kent, drawling a little, and dropping lazily into a chair.

"Why not?"

"Because I want to have a little talk with you."

"But suppose I don't want to have a little talk with you?"

"Oh, but you do."

Adelaide Swift's face grew sharp as she heard these words. Kent watched her from under his lowering brows. Her pinched lips and her eager look, the look of a tigress who scents danger afar, told him that he had serious work on hand.

"How do you know I do?" she asked sharply.

"Because I want to talk of last night."

He had thrown down the glove. He saw that there was nothing else for him to do; and she saw that she had no alternative but to meet the challenge. Their eyes met, and hers were the first to drop.

"Sit down again," he said, for she was still

standing. She looked at him again, and then compressed her lips and obeyed.

"Well?" she said, bravely breaking the silence.

"Well," he answered, in a perfectly quiet and emotionless tone. "I had the pleasure of dining with you last night."

Adelaide's heart gave a bound of joy. Perhaps he only suspected something of her secret, and actually knew nothing. She determined not to be tricked into any accidental self-betrayal. She wished she had not sat down.

"Is that all?" she said, lightly. "I hope you enjoyed it."

"Immeasurably. It was a very pleasant dinner. Too bad it was interrupted by your illness."

"I am sorry if my illness interfered with your enjoyment."

"It did, materially. Oh, by the way, I want to ask you something. You remember I started for down town as soon as I saw you and Mrs. Smith in the pony-phaeton? Well, I met your husband at the Elevated Railroad station. Mrs. Swift, your husband was very anxious about you."

"Oh, was he?" inquired Mrs. Swift, with irony in her voice.

"I told him you had gone home. We went there, but failed to find you. Mrs. Swift, your husband was extremely anxious."

"The dear fellow!" murmured Mrs. Swift.

"We then went—" he made a tantalizing pause before he continued—"*elsewhere*, and we did not

find you. Mrs. Swift, your husband was re-markably anxious."

He smiled. Was it possible that he was only bantering her? Adelaide tried to make her voice sound easy and careless as she said, —

"Well?"

"I trust — I sincerely trust, that his anxiety was finally relieved."

"I don't know about his *anxiety*, as you call it. He was not anxious enough to come to the house a second time during the evening. I suppose he went on his way to Coney Island, for he came back about three o'clock last night, or rather this morning — at least so the servants tell me. I was in bed and asleep."

"You ought to have gone to bed early. I hope you did."

"Of course I did. I don't know why you should take such an interest in my health, though."

"Well, it struck me, after leaving you, that I ought to have seen you home myself."

"There wasn't the slightest necessity, I can assure you, Mr. Kent. I got home very comfortably indeed with Mrs. Smith. We arrived about five minutes after you and Robert left our house. When I found that you two men had been there I was very much pained to think that you had gone so far out of your way for nothing. Provoking, wasn't it?"

"Most distressing," Kent assented; "and we were rather worried about you. Couldn't think what had become of you."

"If you had thought at all, Mr. Kent, it must have occurred to you that we should take some time to go all that distance — and, of course, Mrs. Smith had to drive slowly, on account of my poor head."

"Oh, your poor head!" Kent's tone was one of unmistakable sarcasm, almost insulting in its directness. He rose and stepped to the side of her chair, and touched her shoulder with one finger.

"Mrs. Swift, what did you do in that half-hour which you saved by getting Mrs. Smith to drive so fast that she was arrested on the way home?"

"*Arrested?*"

"Yes, arrested for fast driving. I found her in charge of an officer."

"They — they ran away!" cried Adelaide.

"Those ponies ran away?"

"Do you doubt my word?" she asked, looking up at him with dark and defiant eyes.

"No, but I doubt the ponies' capacity. They're very fat and very tame. Come, now, let us understand each other."

"What do you mean by 'let us understand each other'?"

"I mean this," said Kent, sternly: "you alone have it in your power to do justice to the woman who sacrificed herself for you last night. Will you do it?"

"What woman? — what do you mean?" Adelaide almost shrieked in her desperation.

"Not so loud! What I am saying you understand perfectly well."

"I understand no more than to know that it is an insolence."

Kent went on as though he had not heard her:

"You know the whole truth. You know what your action involves. You know the danger in which you have placed this girl. You know what your own self-respect demands of you."

Adelaide threw up her hands in a wild way.

"Oh, yes," she cried, "I know all that. I know all you mean, and I know what you want. You want me to ruin myself, to give up my husband to save Faith Ruthven. And I know why you want it."

"Do you?"

She laughed hysterically.

"You want me to confess, so that she may be cleared, and so that you can marry her. Oh, you poor wretch! Can't you see for yourself that she wouldn't have you at any price? Can't you see what she wants — my husband?"

If Kent was surprised by this speech, he certainly did not show it. As impassive as ever, he waited for her to continue.

"Everybody sees it," she ran on: "she does not even take the trouble to disguise her infatuation. You saw her yesterday, flirting with him under my very eyes. She went there last night to meet *him*, and you know it. Let me go!"

Kent had grasped her wrist; not roughly, but with a firm hold that she could not shake off.

"Listen to me," he said; "I have something to

say to you — quietly and calmly. You have nothing to fear. Listen to me. You are talking nonsense, and if you do not know it now, you will when you come to your senses. If you will not do what you know you ought to do now, I will try to find some means of making you do it. *I* will not consent to see this poor child sacrificed for your sake; and, sooner or later, you shall do her justice. I wish you to remember that. Now I will detain you no longer."

He dropped her hand and walked out of the room and out of the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXPLOSION.

MRS. SWIFT, looking out through the window, saw Kent going up the street with his long firm strides. She almost wished he had not gone. Their conversation had been of a most distressing nature, yet anything seemed better than the awful loneliness in which she suddenly found herself. For a woman of Adelaide's temperament solitude of any sort was painful, and she had now for the first time a realizing sense of what spiritual isolation meant. She was not only alone in the dim reception-room, with the afternoon shadows falling about her, she was alone in the world — alone with a secret, alone, as she began to feel, with a sin. The poor woman had made her first plunge into deliberate wrong-doing, only to find out what the meanest sinner could have told her, that she had got into a stream of which no one could guess the depth or the current. She had calculated, she thought, the risk she ran in going to Carnegie's studio. But it seemed to her now that there was not a crime in the calendar which she had not put herself in the way of committing. She even thought, with unspeakable

horror and agitation, that the time might come when she would find herself fighting a temptation to kill somebody to cover up this act of folly that now loomed up as big and as black as the unpardonable sin.

She had no reason to torture herself, however. Adelaide's capacity for downright crime stopped at suicide, and did not extend to murder. Her impulsiveness, her unreasoning passion, were capable of making unbounded mischief; but only in a negative and wholly feminine way. She could never have lifted her hand to kill, though she could very well hold it from saving.

But at this moment she was afraid of herself, afraid of her conscience, afraid of vague terrors which her mind conjured up in every direction. It seemed to her that she could take no comfort unless all the people concerned in this trouble which she had brought upon herself were gathered together where she could watch them all. She thought that she could feel a comparative peace of mind if only she could get her husband and Carnegie and Kent and Faith in one room and study their every word and look for indications of danger. It must be said for Adelaide that her new error had driven out the old as one nail drives out another. Her predominant emotion was simple fear, and although her jealousy of her husband was intensified, all thought of fighting infidelity with infidelity or pretence of infidelity was gone, never to come back again. She saw clearly enough the danger and the worthlessness of that line of battle, and a deadly fear made her

anger and sense of wrong secondary considerations for the moment.

Yet even the small advantage of having to deal with but one woe was denied her. She opened the door to flee from the house, and came face to face with Mr. Ruthven, who had at last remembered that there was a guest within his gates who could not be received and had not been dismissed.

Adelaide felt a new chill of alarm come over her as she saw Mr. Ruthven's face of surprise. His speech of explanation did not in the least re-assure her.

"I thought your husband was here," he said.

"My husband?"

"Haven't you seen him?"

"Not since yesterday at five o'clock."

"But he was here just now."

"Here?"

"Why, yes, here," repeated Mr. Ruthven, irritably, too much concerned with his own misery to notice Mrs. Swift's face; "he called to see Faith, you know."

"But I don't know!" cried Adelaide; "what did he call to see Faith for? He saw her yesterday afternoon."

"I'm sure I don't know. Don't ask me. All I know is, he was here a few minutes ago. I have come to tell him that Faith can't see him. She's ill."

Adelaide's eyes dilated. If she had not thoroughly believed what she said to Kent when she said it, she believed it now most sincerely. Her

mind was well prepared for the idea. Having herself sunk to a lower moral plane than she had ever reached before, she had judged Faith by this lowered standard. Even at the moment when Faith had averted the danger of discovery and disgrace that seemed imminent and inevitable, she had felt only a sense of gratitude to a friendly fellow-sinner. When the two women met and recognized each other in the moonlit gallery, Adelaide accounted for Faith's presence by the simple supposition that their errands were of the same nature. She had not troubled herself yet to inquire whether those errands were only similar or really identical. If she had believed anything at first, she had believed that the latter was the case. The voice of jealousy had spoken in her words to Kent, but not until this moment had she a firm conviction that Faith had gone to the studio to meet her husband. Now it all seemed terribly clear to her. She knew little of Faith's relations with Carnegie, and she did know that Carnegie could not have betrayed her own appointment with him. The girl, she felt certain, had gone to Carnegie's room to meet Robert Swift, and Kent had probably been used as a screen. She remembered that Kent had said that Swift would be the first at the studio; she remembered that Faith must have been in the gallery when she herself arrived, and she burst forth, —

"Where is my husband?"

Mr. Ruthven raised his eyes with weary resignation, and looked like the patient camel about to break down under the last straw.

"What is the matter now?" he inquired mournfully.

"I want to know where my husband is."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Ruthven, "he's in the other room, across the hall. If I can find him for you, Mrs. Swift, I'm sure I shall be most happy."

They looked in the other room. It was empty

"Where is he?"

"My dear," remonstrated Mr. Ruthven, "calm yourself. He is somewhere in the house."

"Oh, yes! And *where?*"

Mr. Ruthven rang the bell, and waited without attempting to interrupt Adelaide, who seemed to have lost all control of herself.

"Where?" she demanded, "where, I want to know? It has all gone too far. I won't stand it any longer. You may be as blind as you please, Mr. Ruthven, but my patience is exhausted. If you choose to let this kind of thing go on, you may, but I propose to stop it."

Ruthven had pretty well made up his mind to the fact that he was "in for" a scandal — the first that had ever touched his own house, and the novelty of the situation filled him with a sort of passive wonderment. He had not the least idea of what he was going to do; in fact, he felt some doubt that the course of events would leave it to him to do anything. In conjunction with what he had heard before, Mrs. Swift's outcry served to confirm his impression that his demure and self-contained

daughter had suddenly become the most diffusively indiscreet of flirts. It will be seen that he had not yet put two and two together; he thought only that Faith had been guilty of two separate and distinct indiscretions. When he understood, a few moments later, that the two comparatively trivial charges against her combined themselves into one accusation of the utmost gravity, Mr. Ruthven felt himself a very feeble old man indeed.

The servant who answered the bell said that Mr. Swift had gone up-stairs. No, he had not gone out. Mr. Kent had arrived and departed, but Mr. Swift was last seen ascending the stairs.

Adelaide hardly waited for the man to get out of the room.

"You see!" she began, "I knew it. Faith could receive *him*, while she kept me waiting down here."

"Absurd!" murmured Mr. Ruthven mechanically, his mind filled with a horrible conviction that if Faith had really received Swift, it must have been in her own room.

"Absurd, is it? Then where is he?" Adelaide demanded. Her inquiry was pitilessly unanswerable. Mr. Ruthven, standing on the rug at the foot of the stairs, gazed vacantly at the bronze plaque on the newel-post. It represented a head of Medusa, and it occurred to the master of the house that the writhing snakes gave a curious suggestion of the sensation in his own brain at the moment. He determined to change that bit of bronze at the

earliest possible opportunity. He felt that it would ever after have a disagreeable association for him.

"My dear Mrs. Swift," he said, with nervous hesitation, "you appear to be the victim of an — er — wholly causeless — er — jealousy — if that is what has moved you to this unfortunate outbreak."

"Unfortunate outbreak!" Adelaide repeated in scorn; "do you think that two women can love one man without an unfortunate outbreak?"

Her voice, raised to a high pitch, startled Ruthven. He opened the door of the reception-room.

"Come in," he said; and when she had followed him, he began to speak with more decision.

"Faith — my daughter — has no especial regard for your husband, Mrs. Swift. Of that I am positive — quite positive."

"Prove it to me, then. It will save a great deal of misery. But you can't — you know you can't."

"It may save," replied Mr. Ruthven, something of his natural chilly cynicism coming back to him, "a great deal of inconvenience. I will prove it to you if you feel calm enough to listen to me. My daughter has, I regret to say — I regret extremely to say —" he began to feel more at his ease as he spoke the conventional words, and he dropped into his familiar attitude of graceful importance, and swung his gold eye-glasses with a delicate gesture of emphasis. "My daughter has entered into an — er — engagement of marriage with a very — er — undesirable person, according to my views — with Mr. John Carnegie. She — in fact — is attached to him."

Adelaide made no reply in words, but her white and angry lips emitted a feminine "ah!" which spoke infinite contempt and incredulity.

"Were you possessed of this information?" asked Mr. Ruthven.

"Oh, I suppose she is amusing herself with him too. What do I care about him? I tell you it's my husband she's after. I've suspected it all along, and now I'm sure of it."

"You do not mean to say that because —"

"No, I don't mean to say that I'm sure of it just because she's seen him up-stairs in her own room. It isn't that. I've more than that. I know —"

She stopped, catching sight of Mr. Ruthven leaning against the mantel and looking very faint. A sudden compunction softened her rage for a second.

"I don't mean to be hard on you, Mr. Ruthven," she said, "but I'm a cruelly wronged woman, and I want my rights. Let me have my husband back, and I'll say no more."

She felt a mild thrill of self-sacrificing virtue as she thus promised to refrain from speaking of the events of the previous night. She really thought as she spoke, that she was voluntarily giving up an advantage, or a privilege, she did not quite know which.

As to Ruthven, he did not clearly understand her; he could only grasp the fact that his daughter's unhappy escapade was revealed to him in a new and terrible light, and that he himself felt ill — very ill.

Varying sensations crowded upon his mind so thickly that he could take no account of them, further than to comprehend that they were all painful.

He leaned his head upon his hand, his elbow resting on the mantel.

"I haven't your husband, Mrs. Swift," he said feebly. "I'm sure I don't know anything about him. Let me assure you you're all wrong — entirely wrong. I can't discuss it with you now, though. You've really made me very nervous. I'm quite ill — too ill to talk. Pray let me beg of you to go home — it sounds very strange, I know, but you'll have to excuse me — if you'll only go home!"

"But my husband?" put in Adelaide, rising.

"If he's here, he shall be sent after you. I promise you that. I certainly can't have a scene between you two here, you know. It wouldn't do at all, and I couldn't stand it. Now go, there's a good soul. I suppose you've behaved very ill, and I'm sure you're all wrong, but I can't talk about it now. Excuse my seeing you to the door."

He still stood in the same position, and Adelaide saw that he was really much affected, physically, by his agitation. She went from the room without further words, but she did not leave the house. She stepped into the room across the hall, to see if there were any tell-tale traces of her husband's occupancy. She saw no hat or cane, no carelessly dropped glove; but as she stood there she heard Ruthven leave the other room and slowly climb the

stairs. Moved by some sudden, scarcely sane impulse, she slipped out and followed him noiselessly. She only wanted to listen and find out where Ruthven was going — whether to the front room or to his daughter's chamber.

Goethe spoke of one of his works as "a bundle of motives." Adelaide Swift was a woman of action; her life was made up of an infinite variety of deeds, for which the largest bundle of motives would have been inadequate to account. She certainly would have found neither reason nor excuse for her action when, on hearing Mr. Ruthven's hesitating footsteps go down the long hall, she softly followed him.

He turned at the door of Faith's room, and saw her. He lifted his white hands in a desperate and deprecating way, and, apparently perceiving the hopelessness of arguing with her, knocked at the door, and waited for an answer. Adelaide, too, approached and listened, but no sound came from within. Ruthven repeated his knock, and then tried the door. It was unfastened, and he pushed it open.

Through a window looking on the garden the western sun streamed in, its rich gold softened by the lace curtains within, and the swaying lilac blooms of the wistaria outside. It threw a shaft of dusty brilliance far into the room, a shaft of light in which bright motes flitted up and down, and became invisible when they passed the sharply defined boundary line of darkness. For the rest of

the room was in shadow, and the two who entered strained their eyes for a moment before they saw Faith stretched upon the bed, her face in the pillows.

They had come in softly, but she heard them and raised her head, and, seeing them, guessed or half-guessed their errand.

"Faith," said Mr. Ruthven in a tone of dreary hopelessness, "have you seen Mr. Swift?"

"No!" said Faith, rising to her feet. She spoke simply, yet decidedly, being only surprised at the question.

"You see!" Mr. Ruthven addressed himself to Mrs. Swift.

Adelaide looked about the room, actually as though she expected to find her husband concealed in a corner.

"You see!" reiterated Mr. Ruthven.

The blood began to rise to Faith's pale cheeks.

"What does this mean, father?" she asked.

"I'm sure I couldn't help it," said the old gentleman, almost wailing. "I told her the idea was perfectly preposterous."

"*What idea?*"

"I came to this house to find my husband, Faith Ruthven," said Adelaide, boldly.

"Did you expect to find your husband in this house?"

"I did."

Faith stood silent, too bewildered at this new blow to be indignant. Ruthven watched her impatiently, and wholly misinterpreted her silence.

"Do you hear this woman?" he broke out at last.

"Do *you* believe her?"

Faith turned upon him so suddenly, and put such a direct and pointed question, that he was staggered, and stumbled awkwardly in his answer.

"I — I have told Mrs. Swift of your — er — penchant for Mr. Carnegie, but I am sure I cannot understand why she advances this — this — extraordinary accusation."

"I know why," said Faith, after a second's pause. Her cheeks had lost their quick flush, and there was a firmness in the lines of her mouth that was almost hard. Ruthven was a little frightened at this new look. He had seen it but once before, and was not accustomed to it.

"Give me that letter I left with you," she went on.

Ruthven drew it slowly from his pocket, and handed it to her. When she saw that it was still unopened, a sudden expression of relief and joy and pride passed over her face that made Ruthven draw himself up. He felt better content with himself than he had felt that day. But self-humiliation resumed its sway when she came up to him and kissed him and whispered in his ear, —

"Thank you!"

He looked uneasily at Adelaide. Faith looked at her too with a long and steady look. Then she crossed the room and gave her accuser the letter.

"Read that," she said, clearly and firmly; "*you* have the right."

This was not what Adelaide had expected, but she promptly took the envelope, tore it open, after a hasty glance to see that it was really intact, and went to the light to read the letter. Mr. Ruthven and his daughter waited and watched her.

They saw a cold smile creep over her face; a cruel smile that gave no hint of mirth to the parting of the fine lips. She made no comment; she only looked Mr. Ruthven full in the eyes as she handed him back the letter, and he read in her look a bitter triumph.

It took Mr. Ruthven nearly a minute to read the few lines that Carnegie had written that morning. He was obliged to go close to the window, and he found difficulty in adjusting his glasses, and fresh difficulty in getting the light to fall rightly on the paper. The light died out of Faith's face as she waited, and the horrible thought grew in her heart that Carnegie had turned against her. And this was as though the heavens had fallen. There had been no words spoken between them at their parting the night before, for Kent was present and Megilp, but look and touch had spoken for them, and Faith still felt upon her cheek the hasty and furtive touch of the lips of her lover as he bore her to the couch, just before all sense left her for a little space.

When her father had read the letter, he gave it to her without a word, and she looked at Carnegie's message for the first time. It ran, —

"My Own Faith, — I have not the slightest idea why or when you came to the studio last night; but of course you know that I love you too well to require any explanation before you are ready to give it. When can I see you to tell you so?

"Jack."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DECISION.

WHEN Faith lifted her head, bowed low in the waning light, her father was no longer in the room. Turning to seek him, she faced Adelaide, in whose face the look of triumph had given place to one half fright and half defiance.

Faith moved wearily toward the bed, and Adelaide spoke first.

"I suppose it's all over with me now?"

Faith scarcely heard her. Adelaide began to speak again:

"Of course it's all over —"

"What?" asked Faith absently.

"I suppose you will tell everything now?"

"You know I shall not."

As Faith Ruthven made her answer, she had a strange remembrance of some old scene of her school-days when Adelaide had asked her nearly the same question, and she had responded in nearly the same words. That was some trivial occasion, — she could not now remember anything about it, — but it had seemed then a very serious matter to the two girls. Faith almost smiled in her grief as she thought how

gladly she would go back six years and bear the little burden of that old boarding-school scrape. Oh, if all that were before her were only the principal's loftily severe lecture, or the awful condemnation of the "letter home"! And yet she had some faint memory of bitter tears wept over the disgrace that had befallen her for refusing to "tell on" her bosom friend. What tears were in store for her now? It mattered not. Whether it was school-girl honor or woman's loyalty that bound her, the obligation was the same.

"You know I shall not," she repeated.

Adelaide's face darkened.

"I presume you expect me to be grateful for that?"

"I expect nothing from you," replied Faith coldly. She felt that Adelaide's presence was an outrageous intrusion. But Adelaide hardly knew what she was doing.

"Oh, no!" she cried, "you expect nothing from me, except that I shall humble myself in the dust before you, and let you heap coals of fire upon my head! Oh, I understand quite well what you expect of me. I am to acknowledge your noble, generous, self-sacrificing conduct, and shut my eyes and my mouth, whatever my husband does."

Faith's eyes opened wide at the bare brutality of this attack. It did not anger her, for she was able to see that Adelaide was quivering with passion, and could not have checked her words even had she fully appreciated their force.

"Your husband!" said Faith, and her voice had an inflection of careless scorn: "if you only knew — but what is the use of telling you now? You had better go — go at once. You need not be afraid. I will keep your secret. I should have kept it in any case."

"Perhaps you'll excuse me," Adelaide insisted, "if I ask why you are so remarkably self-sacrificing?"

"It is not for *your* sake. You are under no obligation."

"For whose sake, then?"

"For mine."

Adelaide looked puzzled, and her face changed in a peculiar way.

"I dare say you don't understand me. There is no necessity of explaining. If you will only go away, I shall be obliged to you."

But Adelaide did not go at once. She lingered a second, and twisted her fingers together after an awkward fashion. It was very rarely indeed that Adelaide Swift was awkward in anything, and this little childish trick brought back to Faith another memory of other days, when two little white-pinafored girls with braided hair fought furiously over trifles, and made up again, and kissed, and wandered together, apart from other girls, their arms about one another's waists. The thought gave her pain, and she turned abruptly to her dressing-table, and made pretence of trifling with the objects upon it, while she waited for Mrs. Swift to go.

Adelaide broke the constrained silence with a little speech which she evidently found it hard to utter.

"Faith — if — if I've been wrong — if it isn't — *so* — why, of course, I — "

She paused, and waited for the other to help her out. But Faith only made a slight movement as if to draw still further away, and Adelaide saw it, turned and went.

Faith stood a long time by her dressing-table, looking out on the garden below her, where the pale-green leaves, tossing in the breeze, turned up black and sharp against the low late sunlight. Her mind was a blank. She was thinking of absolutely nothing, and her eyes were idly following the movements of a ridiculous little brown dog that had run out from the stable yard, and was hunting for imaginary rabbits in the shrubbery, when she came to herself with a start.

She bathed her face and smoothed her hair, and changed her loose wrapper for a light dress not much more elaborate; and then she put some *eau de Cologne* on her eyes, which ached with unshed tears, and went out. She was aware that she had not fully taken in the extent of her affliction; but she knew that whatever was to come must be met and borne bravely.

She found the lights lit and half turned down in the front room. It was empty and silent, save for a rustling of curtains and draperies and the leaves of the plants and vines in the windows, as the warm

breeze rose and fell. As she drew near to the open casements her ear caught a faint and far-away hum which she knew to be the roar of Broadway, gradually dying out as the long day's work of the city drew to a close. In the avenue below her a man and a boy suddenly started up a strident duet, bawling "Strawberr-e-e-es — fresh strawberr-e-e-es!" and then they betook themselves to some more frequented thoroughfare, and the street was still again until a child's voice was raised in shrill complaint, and Faith, looking out, saw a nursemaid dragging an unwilling infant home from the green delights of Washington Square. Miss Ruthven looked after the child with a certain interested curiosity. The little thing was already experiencing unhappiness of a sort. There was a fellowship of pain between them. She wondered if grief ceased, after a certain point, to be comparative; and if in her present trouble she was really any better off than the great sufferers of earth — the murderers and the martyrs.

She heard a bell strike six, and recognized its tone. It was the bell in the church at the corner of the street where the studio building stood. The sound brought the thought of Carnegie sharply to her mind. She had, indeed, no thought of which he was not part and parcel; but now her whole mind was brought to bear upon the position in which she stood to her lover.

As Faith sat and pondered at the window, she was not trying to define that position to herself. She knew quite well what it was, and what she her-

self must make it. Long before her father and Adelaide found her lying upon her bed, she had made up her mind what her course was to be. The reading of Carnegie's letter only confirmed her in a determination which she had taken. What she was thinking of now was how she should carry out that determination. She foresaw a severe struggle — she foresaw opposition in various forms. She was trying to prepare herself for the battle. And it came upon her sooner than she had expected.

Her father's voice fell upon her ears, calling her name. She answered him and rose to meet him as he entered the room. He addressed her at once, in an agitated voice:

"Faith, Mr. — Mr. Carnegie is here."

She had already heard her lover's quick step behind the elder gentleman, and, in spite of herself, she gave a little cry of joyful welcome. Then, in an instant, she found herself in his arms.

"Faith — my own! what does this mean? I've waited all day for an answer to my note, and I have only just got it from your father."

"I — er — sent for Mr. Carnegie," Mr. Ruthven put in.

"I was about to come, anyway. I couldn't wait longer — I want to see if my little girl needs me."

"She does, Jack," said Faith, as she pushed him gently from her; "but it is for the last time."

"What on earth do you mean, my darling?" he cried, half-afraid that she was not in her right mind.

"My daughter means, Mr. Carnegie," her father

interposed, coming to the front with a boldness born of desperation, "that she was found in your studio last night, and that she has as yet been able to give no — er — satisfactory explanation."

Carnegie looked, wrathful and amazed, at the neat old gentleman standing in his flawless respectability, an incarnation of all that is cruelest in our conventional social system.

"Did her father ask an — er — satisfactory explanation?" he demanded, and his mimicry was overtly offensive.

Mr. Ruthven colored slightly.

"When my daughter compromises herself, I have a right to know — "

"When your daughter does compromise herself, you *will* have a right. Your daughter is my promised wife, sir; and in my studio she is under the protection of a man who loves and respects her — which is more, it seems, than her father does."

Ruthven drew himself up, and his face grew hard. He had one of his own sex to deal with now, all his disappointment and distress turned to the gall and bitterness of anger. He asked with clear enunciation, —

"Does the — er — man know why Miss Ruthven went to his studio?"

"No," returned Jack promptly, "but he'll find out. Faith, why did you go there?"

Faith looked up in his face and said simply, —

"To ask your pardon for what I said to you in the afternoon, and to leave the flower you asked me for."

"The flower! I never saw it."

"No," murmured Faith sadly.

"What became of it?"

"Some one destroyed it, Jack, and with it our happiness."

Carnegie drew a long breath. He began to see how matters stood. Releasing Faith entirely, he faced Ruthven.

"Mr. Ruthven," he asked, in a quiet and matter of fact manner, "what is this accusation against your daughter?"

Mr. Ruthven's angry voice trembled as he replied,

"That she went to your studio to meet Mr. Swift."

Carnegie was unprepared for this, and his self-possession left him suddenly.

"Who uttered that infamy?"

"His wife," Mr. Ruthven answered calmly.

Carnegie was inexpressibly shocked.

"Great God!" he cried in his horror.

"Instead of calling on your Creator, Mr. Carnegie — it — er — seems to me that your duty is to see to my daughter's vindication. It is through her — er — affair with you that she has compromised herself — at least in my eyes. Can you disprove the charge against her?"

"No; but I can disbelieve it."

He crossed to Faith, and would have put his arm around her, but she drew away.

"I know what you are going to say, Jack. You mean that you do not care — that you will make me

your wife whatever *any one* may say. But it can't be, Jack."

"Faith — what do you mean?"

"Jack, I can never be your wife."

He looked anxiously into her eyes and took her hand.

"Faith, my love, do you know what you are saying? Look at me, dear, and try to be calm. You are — excited," he went on, hesitatingly, for her chill quietude gave the lie to his word.

"No, Jack, I am not excited. I know quite well what I am saying."

"You can't!" he cried; "it is impossible!"

Looking again at her, he caught a side-glance and a sudden appeal in her eyes, which he interpreted the more quickly that it was in harmony with his own desire.

"Mr. Ruthven," he said, turning to the elder man, "I should like to speak to your daughter alone."

"I do not see the necessity," said Mr. Ruthven.

Faith went up to him and spoke in so low a voice that he could scarcely hear her.

"I wish you would go, father. It's for — for the last time."

The pathetic softness of her tone touched him; and the unfamiliar name by which she addressed him struck him with a feeling akin to fear. He opened his lips once or twice as though to make some protest, and then went away with hurried steps.

When they were left together, Carnegie approached Faith with outstretched hands; but again she drew back.

"No, Jack, you have not understood me. Please hear me, dear, and don't try to — don't come near me — only listen. There must not be any more misunderstanding between us now. Jack — " and she raised her sweet, honest eyes to his face. "I love you — I love you with all my heart, Jack; but don't — oh, don't — don't — *don't* ask me to marry you now!"

Carnegie did not attempt to decrease the distance between them; he spoke with earnest simplicity, moved by the love and grief that he saw behind all her firmness as he could never have been moved by any direct protestations of affection.

"If you love me, Faith," he said, "you know I love you. And if, for a little while, I did not understand — "

She interrupted him nervously.

"It isn't that, Jack. How can you think so? That's all past, you know. And I know — I knew all the time — you didn't mean it."

He moved a little forward at this, but she only shrank back the further.

"Think of it yourself, dear," she continued: "would you ask me to marry you after what has happened? Oh, yes, you would, I know, *now* — but to-morrow you would be sorry."

"Faith!" he cried reproachfully.

A flush came into her white cheeks.

"No, dear, you don't understand me yet. I know you believe in me — I haven't even asked you if you did — I was sure of it. It is for my sake, Jack, that you would be sorry."

"I don't see what you mean, Faith," he said with some bitterness. "I do *not* understand you. If you mean that you think you are going to suffer any annoyance from what happened last night, I can tell you you are mistaken. Nobody is going to say anything, and if any one did, it would never be believed."

"My father believes it."

"Your father!" His tone was contemptuous.

"Hush, Jack. He is my father."

"Well — he doesn't believe it — he can't — it's impossible."

"Even if he does not, he doubts me. So does — Adelaide."

Carnegie drew his breath hard and groaned.

"But what if these people do doubt you," he said at last, "so long as *I* don't?"

"So long as any one doubts me," she answered firmly, though her voice was low, "I will not consent."

"You do not love me!"

She turned upon him, changed in an instant. The blood was hot in her cheeks; her eyes flashed; she had drawn herself up to her full height, and it seemed that a sudden beauty had come upon her which anticipated the passion and glory of full womanhood.

"You know I love you!"

Carnegie's senses were gone. Mad with his love and his disappointment, he caught her in his arms, and she turned to virgin marble within his grasp. He did not know what he was saying; he remembered afterward only that his wild and incoherent pleadings had fallen upon ears of stone; that he had left the house dazed and silent, conscious of nothing but a blind despair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT A DISADVANTAGE.

BUT, however blind and boundless our despairs may seem, they are but waterspouts of tears, that, indeed, melt vaguely and wildly into the clouds, but rise only from a small and well-defined connection with a mundane source of supply. Jack Carnegie's new grief, that spread out into the vast realms of eternal desolation, had a small and practical end. "A broken heart" is a figurative expression for a state of spiritual disturbance which may be in itself far above the things of earth; but a broken engagement is in some respects a most practical and prosaic matter, and so Jack, fortunately for himself, found it.

The next morning Mr. Carnegie changed his linen from force of habit, and in deference to the customs of the civilized world he put on a hat when he went out; but neither force of habit nor his regard for the prejudices of society had controlled his impatience sufficiently to induce him to shave himself, and Mr. Ruthven, whom the agony of a nation could not have induced to appear in public with an untended chin, met the young lover on Fifth Avenue,

marching southward, and stopped him in his rapid course.

Carnegie was inclined to be discourteous, even disrespectful; but Ruthven gave him no chance. The father was cool and collected; the lover was nervous and weak. He had not slept, and through the wakeful night his fits of impotent rage had exhausted not only his mental but his physical strength. After a brief disputation, he yielded to Mr. Ruthven, and went with Mr. Ruthven to Mr. Ruthven's club; where he felt himself completely at a disadvantage.

Their conversation was long, but quiet. Mr. Ruthven came armed with full authority from his daughter. She had determined that she would not marry Mr. Carnegie until she was relieved from her equivocal position. Mr. Ruthven heartily applauded her resolution. His reasons were undoubtedly quite different from hers, but he said nothing about that. He contented himself with pointing out the eminent propriety of the attitude his daughter had assumed. He would have felt, he said, that she was not his daughter had she done otherwise. He was mildly surprised that Mr. Carnegie should ask her to keep her promise under the present circumstances. Even were all possibility of a public scandal removed, Mr. Carnegie must feel that his persistent wooing could only serve to keep fresh in Miss Ruthven's memory the shocking events which, as he observed in a very delicate way, would never have occurred had it not been for her association with a suitor to whom her father objected.

And all through his long speech he contrived to imply, without putting it into words, a belief in his daughter's innocence so absolutely affected and artificial that it galled Carnegie more than any open expression of distrust. It was as if he had resolved, for family reasons, to condone and cover up a case of unquestionable wrong-doing. Poor Jack could not but understand that in the face of this veiled disbelief, something not to be openly met, not to be argued down, not to be overcome with time, Faith must feel even more acutely wronged and insulted than if all the blabbing tongues of the world were raised in loud slander of her honor. He himself began to see that it would be only an added cruelty to make the girl his wife while this thorn was in her heart. Not even his own loving trust could counteract the pain which her father's undying suspicion caused her.

When Mr. Ruthven had made an end of his cut-and-dried remarks, he gave Carnegie a letter from Faith. It was a sad and tender little appeal to his consideration and his affection; a prayer that he would not try to conquer her resolve, and it ended with a declaration of her love for him put so simply and in such straightforward words that the tears came into the poor boy's eyes as he read.

It is possible that in spite of the father's skilful attack, backed up with Faith's letter, Carnegie might have made a violent stand for his rights as a betrothed man, and might have altered the course of events without changing the moral situation; but the

spirit of belligerency was weak within him. He felt himself nervous and ill at ease; his brain was weary and clouded, and a heavy despondency had settled down upon him.

Besides this, he was in his enemy's stronghold. In the prim quietude of the great club-room, in one corner of which he sat, unshaven, breakfastless, perplexed and mentally befogged, Jack could have no more raised his voice in violence than if he had been in a church. In fact, a church would have seemed, just then, a much more suitable place for a war of words. There would have been a certain theatrical audacity in braving the stillness of a sanctuary to claim his bride, which would have been rather encouraging to a man like Carnegie, who always enjoyed the luxury of self-created effect. But here a spell was on him more potent than the slumbrous peace of the Garden of Proserpine — the spell of masculine comity. Here, where all men mingled on a basis of formal friendliness, where feuds were suspended and the cry of rancor temporarily hushed, there was a something in the air which made it seem sacrilege to introduce the jar of conflict or to sound the note of inconsiderate self-assertion. Ruthven had well calculated on the subtle influence of the place when he took the young man into the holy precincts of the greatest of New York clubs.

Jack's eyes wandered vacantly about him as the letter hung from his listless fingers. He saw through the portal of the reading-room the files of

papers laid out in ordered rows. He saw an old and bald-headed member sitting by the empty grate, asleep with the *Herald* in his hands, and wondered idly through how many years the old man had sought that chair, summer and winter, and how many griefs he had slept out over his daily journal. Then he looked at a picture that hung over the mantel, and noted certain tricks of color in it, and observed the shabby condition of the frame.

All the time he was trying to think over what had happened and what remained to be done. He was not over-successful; but several practical reflections forced themselves upon his mind. It struck him that he was — and the slang phrase came to him in his thoughts — "stumped." He could not very well strangle Mr. Ruthven then and there, in the club-room, walk down the avenue and carry Faith off to a tropical paradise beyond the reach of extradition treaties. He could not go into the courts of law and demand the fulfilment of the verbal contract Faith had made with him. He could not call a meeting of the parties in interest, and tell his little story about Adelaide Swift. He could not do anything at all at present, and it was only clear to him that he was likely to encounter a great deal of difficulty in doing anything in the future.

While he was pondering, Mr. Ruthven dropped a few observations, rich with the perfect wisdom of commonplace, of which observations Jack heard not one word. When he rose at last, he made straight for the door. Ruthven walked with him, and sup-

plied his part of the polite duet of parting so well that probably not one of the morning loungers about the place noticed that the young man neglected those usual courtesies. Jack himself only became aware of the fact as he reached the door and turned to utter a gruff "good-morning." He left the words unspoken; for his eyes fell on Ruthven's face, and he forgot again the formalities of social observance. Gray-whiskered, small-featured, smooth, the face was as calmly complacent as ever; but in the eyes there shone a torturing hatred all the acuter for its setting.

Whatever may be the state of his mind, there are only two things in this world which will make a man forget forever that he has not had his breakfast. One thing is luncheon, and the other is dinner. It was somewhere between the appointed hours of these two meals when Carnegie discovered that he was faint from hunger. He was then on the boulevard, a half-mile beyond Manhattanville and the Catholic school. He had been walking aimlessly and impetuously since eleven o'clock, and he had an ill-defined recollection of having wandered most of the time in the mazy walks of Central Park. Having come to himself, so to speak, he got his bearings and followed a half-opened cross-street and a footpath across lots to a little hostelry in a little picnic-garden, on the top of a little eminence. There he got an indifferent meal and some good beer and a package of bad cigarettes, and then he found a chair on the veranda and gazed out toward the North River.

The afternoon was wearing on. Through the sparse and scattered clumps of foliage he saw shimmering reaches of the river between the fall of the hilly island and the green slopes of New Jersey, dotted with white buildings. On the boulevard below him the soundless bicycles flashed steely bright past lumbering market-wagons homeward bound. In the little picnic-garden two truant shop-girls and three young men in Sunday black babbled and giggled over their lemonade and their beer, and tried in various ways to attract the attention of the heavy swell on the porch, lavishing upon him much futile sarcasm of a primitive sort. He heard them, but he heeded not. His eyes were upon the glinting bicycles that came and caught the sun and were gone again upon the stretch of dusty white road, and his heart was in a dull old house near Washington Square. He smoked out his package of cigarettes, and when he had thrown the last stump down, he arose, and with a light step went his way.

He had come to a firm determination and laid out a course of action; and, with Jack Carnegie, action meant hope.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ODD P. P. C.

WITH Cecil Kent, action did not mean hope. He was past the time — if there had ever been such a time in his life — when his spirits could be affected by other than logical causes. If he was glad, he had good reason for gladness, and if he was sad, he could not induce cheery delusions by any artificial excitement of energy. Though he worked with an end in view, he never forgot that a great deal of the work done in this world is wasted, and the work itself inspired him not at all. He gave it credit only for the exact distance that it brought him nearer his end, and, as he advanced, he kept the tally of his progress with cold and business-like precision.

There is a certain kind of success that gives no stimulus to ambition. This is the constant and unfailing success of moderate endeavor. Kent had, all through his life, aimed low, and he had rarely failed to hit his mark. Failure itself would have been more inspiriting than this series of half-way triumphs. He did not value victories that brought him trifling honor; and for this very reason he never

felt himself spurred on to higher effort. He had been fairly successful, after the first hard struggle, in the profession he had chosen; and when the goad of necessity was removed he found himself a man old in experience, not very young in years, and completely broken in to habits of stolid perseverance and cautious endeavor. Audacious adventure was out of his power. His only idea of getting on in life was to undertake work for which he knew himself to be thoroughly well-fitted, and to carry it through with patience and persistence. With Kent, industry took the place of zeal, and conviction that of enthusiasm.

At present, he had made up his mind that he had a certain piece of work to do, and he went at it in a dogged and determined frame of mind, neither hopeful nor despairing. He made up his mind to compass Faith Ruthven's vindication, at any cost of time and labor; and he meant to do this simply as a duty, without thought of reward or favor of any sort. Whatever hope lay in his breast was unmixed with any consideration of personal benefit.

He did not conceal it from himself that he was working under great disadvantages. He was wholly in the dark, to begin with. He did not know why Faith had gone to the studio. His own hypothesis was that she had either accompanied or followed Adelaide in the capacity of friend and protector. He had no means of knowing whether Adelaide had lured her there to use her as a scapegoat, or whether she had gone after her indiscreet friend of her own

motive. All that he felt sure of was that Mrs. Swift had sought to have a very imprudent interview with her old lover, and that this fact alone was accountable for Faith's presence in the gallery of Jack Carnegie's room. Like Robert Swift, he had noticed Carnegie's unfeigned surprise at the girl's appearance; and nothing appeared simpler to him than the supposition that Miss Ruthven had imperilled her own name for the sake of her old school-friend.

In consequence, his judgment of Adelaide was unjustly severe. He thought that she was attempting to take a cruel advantage of Faith's sacrifice; and with this idea in his mind he naturally debited her with all manner of actively iniquitous intentions. He made himself ready to fight Mrs. Swift, to prevent her adding any further to Faith's embarrassment and perplexity. He had not for one second guessed that Miss Ruthven was secretly engaged to Mr. John Carnegie; and had it been suggested to him he would have found difficulty in believing it.

He called at the Ruthvens' in the morning, at the very hour when Mr. Ruthven was crushing Jack Carnegie's hopes in the long club-room up the avenue. After a little delay, Faith received him in the bright apartment where the breakfast-table had just been cleared.

After the first formal greeting, they seated themselves near the window, and Faith's eyes fell, not in shame, but with a sad weariness. Kent was the first to speak.

"I ought to tell you why I have come here," he said. "I can't insult you with any miserable little equivocations. I want you to understand that you can count upon my discretion — and my confidence."

He made a little pause before the last three words, a pause in which he looked for her to raise her eyes; but it was not until he had finished his speech that she glanced up at him. A brief light of color came into her cheeks and vanished again.

"Thank you," was all she said; but he knew that she said it from her heart. There was silence, then, for a moment or two. He was choosing his words.

"Don't misunderstand me," he went on, with a careful deliberation. "I do not wish to ask you any question which you could even hesitate to answer. But I wish you to make sure that there is no way in which I can be of service to you. I have come here for that purpose only. If there is any way in which I can possibly help you — if you need help — I want you to call upon me. Mind, I say *be sure*. You will naturally tell me that there is nothing I can do for you. I wish you to make certain that there *is* nothing."

She did not answer him, and, as though fearing that he had spoken in too dictatorial a tone, he continued, —

"Perhaps you are angry with me for suggesting such a thing. You won't be when you come to think of it. I am rather blunt, I suppose; but it

may be that I have the power to serve you in a difficulty of which you do not wish even to acknowledge the existence. If that is the case, I am satisfied. Be as angry as you please with me; only let me be your friend if you really need me."

Faith did not, perchance, catch the subdued pathos of his tone; but the words he spoke were soothing to her sore heart, and she streched out a little hand, white and trembling.

"I know that you are my friend, Mr. Kent," she said; "thank God!"

And then, in an instant, she clasped his hand with both her own, and, bending her head upon them, wept the first tears that had fallen from her eyes in all her time of pain. This first frank expression of honest sympathy and pity had opened the fountains of her soul.

Kent found himself deeply moved, nervous and awkward. This outburst of grief touched him with love and pity, and a fiery passion sprang up in his breast and would not down; but it found no voice. It were a desecration of this sacred sorrow to utter words of love. This was no time for his wooing. It seemed to Kent that there never would be a time for his wooing.

With his disengaged hand he lightly touched the tangled hair that crowned the low-bowed head. So reverent was the touch that it suggested to Kent himself the action of benediction. He was no poet, and no quoter of poetry; but from that moment he saw a new meaning in Heine's words:

"Mir ist's, als ob ich die Hände
Auf's Haupt Dir legen sollt',
Betend, dass Gott Dich erhalte
So rein und schön und hold."

"So rein und schön und hold" — the words are old and familiar; the song is after all only a jingle; but Heine wrote a "whole host" of such jingles, and for every poor devil in the world there is one or other of these jingles that has a special echo for his heart; and that is why Heine is a great poet to-day — that, more than all his melody and his deviltry, his satire and his sharpness.

Kent let the poor child sob out the momentary impulse of her misery. She controlled herself sooner than he expected, and looked up at him with a faint little smile.

"Mr. Kent," she murmured, "I am very unhappy, and you are very good to me; but indeed you can't do anything for me."

"Why not?" he asked gently.

"Because — because — oh, I can't explain to you."

She was sitting upright now; but he held both her hands, and her tear-stained eyes met his frankly, for all their sadness.

"I don't want you to explain to me," he told her in his quiet voice; "I don't want you to tell me anything you had rather keep to yourself. I only wish to know if I cannot do anything for you, and I will do it without asking any explanation from you. Surely you can believe that I will."

Perhaps the note of a new-found confidence rang too clearly in his voice; perhaps an over-sensitiveness born of her strange situation moved Miss Ruthven; she drew her hands away and looked once more on the floor.

"Mr. Kent," she said, slowly, and with firmness that seemed almost harsh, "there is nothing that you can do for me — nothing."

He made a movement. She thought he was about to rise, and half put out one hand to stay him.

"Please don't misunderstand me — now. You are my friend, and oh, how grateful I am for your — friendship. I know what you mean, and —" she raised her eyes once more — "I appreciate it. But there is nothing you can do — nothing that any one can do."

Speech was difficult, and he paused. She did not wish him to go; but he misconstrued her silence and rose from his chair. She hardly noticed his change of attitude. He stood still for a second, and then she looked up in his face.

"It is very hard for me to speak as I want to, Mr. Kent; but after what you have said, I ought to try. I shall never forget your kindness. I have been a very foolish girl, I am afraid, and I have brought trouble on myself — but it was not my fault — oh, I needn't tell you that — you believe that, I know you do. But there's nothing to be done now. If I have been unwise, I've been punished for it. And there is only one thing that makes me feel — less miserable. Only one thing — *everybody* does not mistrust me!"

One thought for him and a thousand for Carnegie! But how could Kent know this? His hard features grew softer and brighter, and he pressed her hand and bade her good-by at once; for he saw that the tears were near her eyes.

As he was passing through the hall, he met Mr. Ruthven, who had just entered. The old gentleman greeted him with a suspicious glance.

"Good-morning, Mr. Kent," he said coldly: "this is an early visit. You wish to see me?"

"No," was Kent's placid reply; "I came to see Miss Ruthven. I am glad to find she is better than when I saw her the other evening."

"Oh, yes," Mr. Ruthven answered, looking sharply at him; "she's much better — quite well, in fact."

"This was my last chance to inquire," went on Kent, cheerfully indifferent to the other's manner; "that is, my last chance for a week or so."

"You are going out of town?"

"This afternoon."

Mr. Ruthven stood looking at him, frowning slightly. His lips were parted just enough to show the tips of his white teeth. It was a trick he had in moments of irresolution, and imparted to his refined features a certain distant resemblance to the grimace of an angry cat.

"He wants to snarl," said Kent to himself; and he promptly bade the master of the house a pleasant farewell, and got to the street with as little delay as was consistent with dignity.

He would gladly have stayed and braved Ruthven's suspicions; but he knew he could only make matters worse, for he had no means of guessing what Faith's father knew and what he did not know.

CHAPTER XX.

A TIME OF TRUCE.

KENT was really going out of town. He had no important business to take him away, but he made business enough to serve as an excuse. He thought it best to get away from Carnegie, from Ruthven, from Swift, and, most of all, from Adelaide and from Faith. From Adelaide, because he feared that his presence might exasperate her and lead her to commit some mad act of jealous vengeance. From Faith, because he felt that his presence only kept her grief before her eyes. And, naturally, he wished to have as little as possible to say to the three men. Bob Swift was, he felt certain, effectually silenced; Mr. Ruthven, on the other hand, was sure to force unpleasant explanations, sooner or later. As to Carnegie, Kent shrunk from any confidences with him. Perhaps some unavowed shade of jealousy was the source of this feeling.

And so he packed his trunk and went to Boston by the evening train. He knew nobody there, and the place offered no distractions. He wanted to think out a course of action for himself, and ponder over all that was dark to him in this very misty

affair. Perhaps a retirement to Philadelphia might heve served his turn better; but he had relatives in Philadelphia, and he did not wish to be bored just then.

He left a note for Carnegie, but he did not call. Thus he deprived himself of an opportunity of gaining some valuable information — information the possession of which would have obviated the necessity of his putting himself to any further trouble. For Jack would most assuredly have told him that the young lady had a champion who wore her colors.

Had he looked into the studio that afternoon, he would have found its occupant also making preparations for departure, and preparations of a most elaborate character.

Jack had laid out for himself a campaign — a line on which he meant literally to fight it out if it took all summer. And as the summer campaign could not open for some time to come, Mr. Carnegie was forced to satisfy his impatient soul with vigorous preliminary exertions.

He began by setting Megilp to overhaul the entire studio. The most cherished of his possessions were carefully stowed away; old implements of art were either destroyed, or repaired and cleansed and put in a condition of present usefulness; and the artist's travelling equipment was packed and unpacked and repacked a dozen times.

During the latter part of that afternoon and the whole of that evening Megilp was kept very miserable and very busy.

And his misery and his occupation lasted for many days. Carnegie took as much trouble in making ready for his summer journeying as though he were about to start a peripatetic school of art. This was something new in Megilp's experience. His master had been in the habit, for many seasons, of preparing for the annual trip by throwing a few clothes in a trunk, packing a color-box and tying it up together with a sun-umbrella and a folding-stool. After that he was ready to set forth at a moment's notice.

But this year Mr. Carnegie needed a most extravagant outfit, and the clothes that he ordered were alone enough to occupy the thoughts of an ordinary man. Megilp had never seen such a wardrobe. There were Knickerbocker suits in wild profusion, flannel suits and Tweed suits, and what the model called "a whole hattery" of polo-caps, straw hats, Derbies and amorphous felt affairs.

But little painting was done in the studio. When Carnegie was not packing or superintending his minion's labors, he sat with his chair tilted back and his heels on a table and meditated and smoked.

The summer grew full and fair in the next two weeks. Kent lingered in Boston, waiting till the exodus of New Yorkers should begin. Swift passed the larger part of his time at Coney Island, and his wife made herself as gay as the lateness of the season allowed, and took to going to matinées, and driving out at all hours with Mrs. Smith, who was also in a forlorn and reckless frame of mind, Kent being absent.

Faith and Mr. Ruthven dragged on a rather wearisome life in the old house near Washington Square. They had but little to say to each other, although they kept up the conventionalities dear to the father's heart, and not even the sharp-eyed servants guessed that the peace of the house had ever been troubled.

Mr. Ruthven never alluded to what had happened, and in public and in private he was as courteously kind to his daughter as ever. His task was not difficult. Faith's brightness of manner was somewhat dimmed; but even her father's quick apprehension never took note of the fact that she replaced the spontaneous gayety she had lost with a merely artificial vivacity. Under these circumstances it was not hard to establish a *modus vivendi* in the Ruthven family, and the old gentleman was even able to approach a delicate subject without any special awkwardness.

He asked Faith one evening where they should pass the summer. For several seasons Ruthven had taken a cottage at Newport; but they were both heartily tired of the place, and he could guess that Faith would now shrink from the crowded little imitation of New York. Moreover, the Swifts were likely to be at Newport.

Faith caught his meaning at once.

"Do you care much about Newport this year, papa?" she asked.

"I can't say I do. It has grown very wearisome to me of late years. I should rather — er — like a

change myself; but I don't wish to influence you, my dear. At my time of life, all places are very much the same to me."

He dropped into the pathetic key very often now, and made frequent allusions to his age, which, to a stranger, were quite touching. Those who were well acquainted with him knew that he did not really think himself old, and never would.

"I don't know where else to go," Faith said meditatively. "You used to like Saratoga, didn't you, papa? But I suppose it has changed very much since then."

Mr. Ruthven's brows contracted. He liked to call himself old, but he did not like to be reminded of the fact that he had been a habitué of Saratoga in the days when the little city of hotels had something approaching the present social standing of Newport.

"That was when I was a very young man. I wonder how you can think of the place now, Faith. It's horridly vulgar — nothing but horse-racing and gambling-houses, and diamonds, and all that, you know," he said vaguely, "and nobody but the very commonest class of people go there now."

"I don't know anything about it," said Faith, "but I don't suppose there's another place anywhere quite like Newport — that is, if you want society — unless you go to Europe."

"Oh, no, not Europe this year," Mr. Ruthven put in, hastily; "there will be such a — er — disgusting crush, and I really don't feel equal to it."

He was thinking that it would not do at all to take Faith to Europe. If any whisper of the scandal ever came out, the world would draw its own conclusions. There must be no appearance of flight. And then to carry this pale-faced girl about with him through Europe — the prospect did not please him.

"I'd rather go to Saratoga than to Europe," he observed pettishly. "Can't you suggest anything better?"

"There are a great many very nice places in New Jersey, papa. The Benthams were at Monmouth Beach last year, and had the nicest little cottage close by the sea."

"There are a great many nice places everywhere, of course; and as to a cottage close by the sea, I could never stand it. It's damp, for one thing, and — er — depressing, for another."

Faith sighed softly.

"Perhaps you can think of some place, papa."

But Mr. Ruthven could not think of a place, and Faith went wearily over the list of all the "summer resorts" that she had ever heard of, while her father disposed of them one by one.

At last, when the choice seemed narrowed down to Lake George or Mount Desert, there came a diversion.

The postman's sharp whistle sounded across the avenue, and the conversation was broken by the moment of expectancy which always follows that familiar summons.

A minute afterward a servant brought up a letter for Miss Ruthven, and while she read it her father made a few appropriate remarks on the efficiency of the New York post-office, which provided the citizens with a late delivery.

"It's from the Millers, papa. Mr. Miller heard you say that you thought of giving up the cottage, and they want us to come and spend a week or two at their place. Mrs. Miller says that Newport cannot spare you for the whole season."

Mr. Ruthven drew himself up and looked pleased. Mrs. Miller was a very pretty woman.

"If you don't wish to go, Faith —" he began.

His daughter understood what he meant.

"I should like Newport well enough for a week or two, I suppose. I haven't seen much of Gertie Miller this winter."

"It's a very pleasant house," argued Mr. Ruthven, "and I'm not sure but the sea-air would do you good, Faith. You need a little — er — tonic, after six months of New York."

"I am quite well," said Faith.

"No doubt, no doubt, my dear; but I'm sure it would do you good. And then, you know, we can decide at our leisure where to go next. Perhaps the Millers can suggest some nice place."

So it was settled, and Faith began to set the house in order against their going, feeling a certain languid pleasure in the idea of any change whatever from the dull monotony of her life.

She had not seen Jack Carnegie since the day she

had sent him from her. He had written once, in reply to her letter. His epistle was brief but decided in tone. He told her that for the present he would not trouble her or show himself importunate in any way; but that he had not the slightest intention of giving her up, and firmly meant to make her his wife at the earliest possible opportunity. He further said that at a proper time he purposed taking active measures to that end, and that whatever came of the measures, he should love her to his life's end.

This was consoling, after a fashion, but it made Faith apprehensive of some imprudence on her lover's part, and she was positively relieved when she reflected that she was about to put a safe distance between them.

In two weeks' time they went to Newport, and arrived at the Millers' on a warm summer evening. The next morning, Mr. Ruthven, going down to the station to make a lofty and formal complaint about some lost baggage, came across a huge pile of trunks and boxes. It attracted his attention. He examined it carefully, and found on one of the trunks an inscription in bold black letters:

JOHN CARNEGIE,
New York.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OPENING OF THE CAMPAIGN.

HIS mind divided between astonishment and anger, Mr. Ruthven continued his walk around the heap of trunks, and on the other side discovered the owner himself, standing with his legs wide apart and his hands in his pockets, giving directions to three porters.

Their eyes met, and before Mr. Ruthven had time to collect himself, Carnegie came up with outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Ruthven? When did you arrive?"

"Last night," replied Mr. Ruthven, taken off his guard.

"I've just come. The old place is looking well, isn't it? It's five years since I was here last. Scarcely recognized my old stamping-ground."

"Newport has changed greatly of late," Mr. Ruthven said stiffly. He wished it were possible to be rude, but it was not possible. Carnegie spoke in an indifferent tone, with his eyes fixed on the men who were moving his trunks. He made no pretence of cordiality or familiarity. He was puzzlingly natural and easy.

"Yes, I've been very much out of it of late," he went on, "but I'm going to give myself a little holiday this summer. Hi there!" he cried sharply to the porters, "handle that box gently — no, not that way — put the painted side up!"

He turned to Mr. Ruthven and said in explanation, —

"Lay figure — dummy. My holiday means a choice of work. I hope Miss Ruthven is well."

"Quite well," answered her father mechanically. Amazement filled his soul. Was this fellow dissembling some desperate design, or did he really look upon his love-affair as an incident definitely closed, as the French put it?

"Are you here for the summer?" he inquired, vexed with himself for his own precipitancy, but unable to control his impatience; for Jack's careless glance was again fixed upon the truck on which the men were placing a trunk not much smaller than a lady's "Saratoga."

"No, I think not," Jack answered. "It depends upon circumstances. You will stay through the season, of course?"

"No. My stay depends upon —" Mr. Ruthven searched for a word; but could find none better than Carnegie's — "circumstances."

Jack seemed to think that this speech needed no reply. He stood at ease, watching the porters. Mr. Ruthven found the situation growing uncomfortable. He had been taken by surprise, and had received a reminder that Carnegie was a man of the

world, as well as himself. This was not at all the haggard and unshaven youth whom he had patronizingly bowed out of the club parlor. The elder gentleman felt himself for the moment at a disadvantage.

"I have to look after my own luggage," he said. "Good-morning, Mr. Carnegie."

"Good-morning," said Jack, turning around for a second, to favor his senior with a slight inclination of the head, and then returning to his duties of supervision, while Mr. Ruthven hurried off, in an irritated mood, to make himself as disagreeable as possible to the hapless officials who were responsible for the lost trunk.

Jack had opened his campaign with a promising skirmish; and he continued it on precisely the same line.

His appearance at Newport was taken as a signal of a desire to return to the world, and the world welcomed him with open arms. In his person he gave evidence of a complete abandonment of Bohemia; he had all the money he needed to spend; he came back to his people with a neat little artistic reputation that had in it the potentiality of unlimited growth, and he was in every way a most delightful prodigal son for whom to kill the fatted calf.

Everybody was glad to see Jack Carnegie again. Before he had been a week at Newport, he was the most popular young man in the colony. Bohemia had sharpened his wits and developed his social powers. The women found other men insipid beside

him, and the other men were not jealous, seeing that Carnegie in all respects came up to their standard of manly perfection.

Ruthven watched all this with increasing satisfaction. He made sure that Carnegie was fixed at Newport for the season, and that he might take Faith anywhere else without the risk of her meeting the young man again.

For they had already met. Carnegie did not know the Millers; but they had friends in common, and Faith came face to face with her lover at a lawn-tennis party.

The meeting was by no means so awkward as Faith had feared it would be. When Linda Parmelee, the daughter of the house, said, "Faith, I thought you knew Mr. Carnegie?" Faith lifted her eyes to him with a glance of reproachful inquiry, asking him mutely why he was there; but she gave him her hand, and he took it and said in the most natural way possible, —

"Oh, yes, we know each other, and we have played tennis together before this."

He was Faith's partner, and it was fortunate for her that he was. She played badly that afternoon, and would have betrayed her nervousness in that way if in no other, had he not put himself to the front and skilfully simulated a selfish desire to make all the points without her assistance. He was a fine player, and he was clever enough to pass off his performance as a larkish exhibition of exuberance of animal spirits.

Once during the game, while Faith was standing idly in her outer court, watching her partner as he stood close up by the net ably resisting the attempts of the champion of last season to volley the ball down on his feet, she burst into a half-hysterical laugh at a grotesque fancy that came into her head. She imagined a game of lawn-tennis where he and she should play against Robert and Adelaide Swift, with her father and Mr. Kent for spectators.

Carnegie heard her, and cast about for some way of giving her a chance to retire from the game. He put forth all his powers, and defeated the ex-champion at every turn.

"You're too much for us!" cried Gertie Miller from across the net, "and it isn't fair. You are both good players, and I'm a duffer."

Miss Miller picked up her slang from stray members of the British aristocracy who patronized Newport.

"I'll play you alone," returned Jack boastfully.

"No, that won't do," said the ex-champion, a short and stout young man of surprising agility, but at that moment very red in the face, partly from exertion and partly from mortification. He looked, in his white flannels, like a turnip surmounted with a radish.

"I'll play you with Agnes," was Jack's next offer. Agnes was the youngest Miss Parmelee, an awkward little girl just far enough on in her teens to live in tantalized envy of "real grown-up" young ladies.

"I don't want to play," she said sulkily, construing this as a slight.

"Oh, yes, Agnes will do," Miss Miller shrieked, her interest in the game reviving; "but with you and Faith together, it was quite too unfair, you know."

"I don't want to play," repeated Miss Agnes, sullenly.

"Yes, do play, dear. I really would like a rest," said Faith who had hardly moved from her corner.

"You don't want to play with *me*," demanded Jack, striding up to the unhappy little maiden. "Agnes! Agnes! this cruelty from you is an unexpected blow. If you must indulge in heartless indifference to me, don't do it in public."

Miss Agnes giggled and took Faith's racket. Her wounded pride was instantly soothed by Jack's frank and genial chaff. As she afterward expressed it to Annie McVeagh, her "chum," "Mr. Carnegie treats you like a human being. He isn't always looking as if he were thinking, 'in three years I shall be happy to notice your existence, my dear, but not at present.'"

So Faith had a chance to sit down on a bench under a great syringa-bush, and watch Jack Carnegie playing and winning, with the assistance of Miss Agnes Parmelee, who, like most gawky school-girls, played a very good game.

Jack ought not to be there at all, Faith thought, and his perfect ease of manner perplexed and pained her. She could not understand him. When she

had first heard of his presence in Newport, she had feared that he intended to persecute her. Now she began to think that he was trying to wound her with a show of indifference. It was unlike him; but she knew that he was capable of certain forms of affectation, and she had learned from experience how strongly impulse could move him. Yet in her heart she did not believe that he was taking vengeance upon her in this way. There was something in his manner that belied the superficial appearance. She felt sure that he was not playing a part. It was more as though he had really returned to his natural self; as though with his velvet jacket he had thrown aside his sham cynicism and his morbid sensitiveness and misanthropy. She wondered if she had known him truly before.

Somehow, whatever pain he might have in his mind to inflict upon her, she loved this new Jack Carnegie better even than the old. A woman's eyes have a great deal to do with her love. They may see that beautiful which is not beautiful; but they must be forever telling their tale, true or false, to her heart. A man who is sufficiently in love with an ugly woman to forget her unpleasant features simply forgets all about them. They have no more charm for him than they have for the rest of the world; but he takes no account of them. A woman invents for the ugly man whom she loves a charm which is all the more potent to her that it is for herself alone.

Faith was in love with a handsome man, and she

felt a keen pride of personal possession in him as her eyes followed his strong figure in the graceful exercise. This was the first time that she had looked at Jack Carnegie as a stranger might look at him. He was in some way set apart from her now, and she gazed with a new interest at the fine young fellow in his picturesque costume, springing lightly from side to side, swerving to strike the ball with rapid and precise motions of his vigorous arm, or standing at rest, vigilant and bright-eyed.

By and by he gave up his place in the game to some one else, and came and sat beside her on the bench.

"You are not glad to see me, Faith," he said.

"Why did you come here?"

"Why should I not come here?"

"You must have known it would only give me pain."

"I do not wish to give you pain, Faith. You know that. But do you remember what I wrote you?"

"You said that you would not try to make me change — what I had said."

"No, Faith. I did not write that. I told you that I would not distress you with importunities, and I will not. But I also told you that I should never give up the idea that you will be my wife some day."

"You know I cannot."

"I know nothing of the sort. I know that you will some day see the uselessness of the penance

you are imposing upon yourself and me, and I propose to be by your side to watch for the time when you will be ready to let me take you to myself."

"What does that mean? Are you going to follow me?"

"Possibly," he answered with a smile. Then his face grew suddenly grave. "Faith," he whispered passionately, "do you suppose that I *can* keep away from you?"

"But you ought to," she said in almost the same tone; "you have no right —"

He stopped her at once, and she was silent as she heard the tone of determination and authority in his voice. He felt that he placed himself in a more dignified position than that of an importunate suitor, and in her heart she respected him for it and was glad of it.

"I have a right, Faith," he said gravely, "to take what measures I think right for your happiness and for mine. Understand me, I am not going to dog your footsteps and ask you every moment to marry me. But I mean to be by you — to be as near as possible, at all times; to let you feel that I am there, ready when you shall call me to take care of you — better care than any other human being can take of you. I will not pretend to have any claims upon you; I will not even recur to this subject again — you may be sure of that. You have nothing to fear — unless you are afraid to have me near you."

He ended with a smile, and rose to join in the game again. He had spoken throughout with simple

directness, his voice at the ordinary pitch of conversation, and there had been nothing in his way of talking to attract the attention of those about them. Their conversation might have been, for any indications afforded by his manner, on the most commonplace topics.

He gave her no chance to reply, nor did she find an opportunity to speak to him again alone during the afternoon, although he did not, apparently, try to evade her. They had stayed to dinner at the Parmelees', at which meal Mr. Ruthven appeared. Jack greeted him with the same unconcerned simplicity with which he might have hailed any casual acquaintance, and all three mingled in the general chat without embarrassment, although to two the conduct of the third was mysterious and alarming.

As Mr. Ruthven and his daughter drove home that night, he reminded her that they must not lose sight of the fact that they had no plans for spending the rest of the summer; "and your mother, Gertrude, my dear, has quite a — er — lot of people coming to see her this summer. Our room will be preferable to our — er — company pretty soon, I am afraid."

Gertie Miller protested that they must not *think* of going for *weeks* yet; but Faith smiled and said that papa was right — they must begin to look for summer quarters.

They held a consultation that evening. Mr. Ruthven's ideas about a place of sojourn had now taken definite shape. He suggested to Faith that they should avoid the crowded watering-places and

find some spot where she could be really free from all demands of society.

"Some little hole up in the woods, you know," he said, "where we shall have to eat — er — fried beefsteaks and all that sort of thing; but where you can be quiet. I'm sure this eternal running around to parties and dinners and — er — whatever these wild games are — all that kind of thing is wearing you out. You are looking shockingly pale."

This was extremely considerate, and it was not for Faith to ask whether there was another motive behind the consideration for her health.

"I don't want you to eat fried beefsteaks, papa, just because I am pale," she said.

"Oh, never mind me, Faith. I can eat anything, if it is necessary. You need not trouble yourself about me."

Faith knew, indeed, that she need not trouble herself about her Sybarite parent. He would take good care that no fried beefsteaks should trouble his digestion during his term of sylvan retirement.

This much, then, was agreed upon. But neither father nor daughter knew where to find such a place as they desired. Mr. Ruthven made quiet inquiry among the people of the Miller household. He had no intention of letting Jack Carnegie know their plans.

Two days later, he told Faith that he had heard of a possible retreat, and that he was going on a tour of inspection. He had property in Springfield, and it was to transact some business in connection with this property that for a few days he left his daughter in charge of the Millers.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RETROSPECTIVE INTRODUCTION.

FORTY-SIX years before Jack Carnegie came to Newport in his character of reformed Bohemian, Mr. Francis Carrington, one of the leading lawyers of New York, a rich man of good family, married for the second time. He had one child by his first marriage, a girl. By his second he had five daughters, who arrived in Mr. Carrington's handsome house in Grand Street, then a fashionable quarter, at regular intervals of one year. The six girls were educated together, and made their appearance in society in two batches of three. Mary Carrington, daughter of Mrs. Carrington number one, married before she had been "out" a season. She was ugly; she had no particular ability, she had systematically refused to avail herself of the advantages of the expensive education which her father tried to lavish upon her; but she married in her first season, and her husband was rich and devoted to her.

And when Mary Carrington thus promptly took herself off her father's hands, everybody thought that it would not be long before the five Carrington

girls of the second set would go off in a matrimonial blaze of glory. They were all handsome and brilliant young women, of a Juno-like beauty, and each had a special and well-defined talent — saving only the youngest.

Some irreverent person of a later generation once said that the phrase "beautiful and accomplished," now handed over to the exclusive use of the theatrical profession, was originally invented to describe the four elder Miss Carringtons. It certainly did describe them. All were tall and stately, dark-haired and dark-eyed. Anna's special talent was for instrumental music. She was accounted, two years before the war, the best amateur pianist in New York. Angelica had a strong soprano voice, that everybody in her circle preferred infinitely to Sonntag's. Clarissa painted in water-colors and oils, and at one time it was the fashion in the Carringtons' set to declare that dear Clarissa's lovely little sketches on millboard were vastly superior to the "Ruggles Gems." Amanda — old-time names they had all — shone in conversation, and was reputed a wit, and frequently compared to De Staël. Amanda had also a talent which was secretly guarded for the benefit of the elect, but of which the Carringtons were none the less proud that it had a spice of forbidden naughtiness about it. It was very strange, of course, and very shocking; and it would be a most terrible thing were it to come to the knowledge of profane minds; but they set great store by it as showing that pure aristocracy could

claim eminence in a line of effort wholly and iniquitously plebeian, and thitherto confined to the unspeakable and shameless children of the stage. Yes, Miss Amanda danced — *danced* — not only polkas and galops and waltzes, but the veritable *pas* of the theatre.

And it is known that in 1856, in the sacred privacy of her father's back parlor, before some two dozen spectators of judiciously elderly and aristocratic selection, Miss Amanda Carrington, being then seventeen years of age, did, with the consent and approval of her parents, dance and perform, and on rapturous demand did a second time dance and perform, a series of steps and rhythmic motions, accompanied with actions of dramatic correspondence, by her stated to be, and to be known as, the Cachuca, the same being a Spanish dance of more or less hazardous character, socially considered. And it is further stated that in the said dance, as danced and performed by Miss Amanda Carrington, there was nothing calculated in any way to offend the most subdued taste; nor was the said dance at any period notably out of time with the accompaniment, as performed upon a guitar by Miss Anna Carrington. These are facts properly attested to in the best society of New York. And it may be added thereto that Mr. Philip Waters, known and described as a gentleman of the old school, did then and there, before having partaken of his supper, inform Miss Amanda Carrington that she easily surpassed the famous Miss Ellsler, a portrait of

whom, executed by the lithographic process, was to be found in the files of *The Albion*, a journal at that time still widely circulated in the houses of the best people of the American metropolis.

After Amanda, there was naturally no talent left for the fifth daughter, Miss Pamela Carrington. A severe and protracted education failed to discover or to develop capacity for any accomplishment whatever. Pamela was not really a fool; but by comparison with her brilliant sisters, she was, to all intents and purposes, a fool. This was generally understood in the household. She was good-looking, but not in the same degree as her sisters. There was a light of amiability in her face that her sisters had not; but she had not even the luck to possess a desirable point of contrast in this, for none of the Carringtons were ill-natured. In character, in appearance, and in her position in the family, Pamela was perfectly negative. She was meek, gentle and unobtrusive; a nobody who seemed less than nobody among such distinguished beings as those around her.

Yet they all fared alike. Not one of the "beautiful and accomplished" Carrington girls ever found a husband. Neither did poor Pamela. In her case this was not astonishing; but in the cases of the others it was simply inexplicable. Nobody could tell why neither Anna nor Angelica nor Clarissa nor Amanda ever found a husband. Perhaps they rejected the homage of an entire generation, and waited for a second to grow up, only to find that that generation knew them not, their beauty and their

accomplishments. Perhaps the men of their day were more modest than we are now, and feared to look too high. It is all one of the social mysteries of New York. All that is certain is that, forty-five years after the birth of Anna Carrington, the five Carrington girls were known as "rich old maids" to the well-born world that bowed down before their wealth and their respectability in New York and at Newport; and that in both places they were under the technical *chaperonage* of their half-sister, that elder Carrington girl who had found a husband — the ugly and unaccomplished child of Mr. Carrington's first marriage.

They were very well-preserved ladies of middle age. They had all kept up their accomplishments. Miss Anna still played the piano, an amateur Esipoff; Miss Angelica still sang, though now with more excuses and more frequent allusions to her liability to catch cold; Miss Clarissa still painted her little pictures, and, whether by means of their own intrinsic merit, or through the kindly offices of certain artist friends of the Carringtons, some of them had found their way into the exhibitions of the N.A.D. (where, indeed, many people said they showed to decided advantage); Miss Amanda, though she no longer shocked and thrilled the cream of society by executing patrician modifications of the Cachuca, still shone as a wit — a somewhat sharp and cruel wit, now, as though with years the button had been worn off the tip of that foil of repartee with which she thrust and parried. With Miss Pamela alone

age had dealt rather harshly. "Poor Pam always has had bad luck," her sisters said, when they saw her hair turning gray while theirs retained its blackness. But poor Pam sat as contentedly under this honorable burden as she had sat under all the dispensations of life.

Weighed fairly in the balance, it may be, Miss Pamela's forty-one years would have shown a better general average of happiness than Anna or Angelica or Clarissa or Amanda could have boasted. If she had never known the delights of successful brilliancy and beauty, she had been spared the pains and anxieties of social ambition. Her sisters had been kind to her, with a superior and protecting kindness that had no touch of tyranny in it. She had all her life followed their lead and submitted to their judgment. True, it had always fallen to her to entertain the bores, the too old and the too young people and the poor relations, while her elders coquetted with eligible adorers, princely slaves of their charms. This was not altogether entertaining; but it had made her, in the long run, many little friendships which she prized; and had done something more for her, of which she was quite ignorant. This discipline had given her tact, a faculty for making herself agreeable after a quiet fashion, and a patient and practical philosophy which smoothed her way of life.

If Miss Pamela had started out as a fool, comparatively speaking, she was no fool now. From her long ordeal of subordination she had learned

discretion; from her dealings with the poor, the awkward, the dull and the distressed, she had acquired an insight into human nature which was, no doubt, empirical, but served her better than the wisest theory. People were just beginning to see this; though to her sisters Pamela was still the weakling of the family.

Jack Carnegie had seen it, and not newly either. He remembered how, a raw boy, ill at ease with himself and the world, he had been taken by his father to make a first call at the Carringtons'. He remembered how Miss Pamela had been told off to entertain him. He remembered, too, how sweetly and patiently she had gone about her task, and how, after rejecting her gentle advances for a while, he had warmed up into an uncouth intimacy with the young lady who seemed so much his senior that he was in a state of grateful wonderment at the little assumption of deference with which she treated him.

Since that day he had liked Miss Pamela, and when, older grown, he understood how much tact and good sense went to the winning of his boyish respect, he observed to himself that there were greater fools in the Carrington family than poor Pam.

To Miss Pamela he now went for aid in his wooing, and frightened her a little at first. Had he told her the whole story he would have frightened her much more. But he did not. His tale had nothing at all out of the commonplace.

"You see, I love Faith," he said, when the time came to make a clear and condensed statement of the situation, "and she cares for me. I know she does. She has said as much. As I told you, I haven't the right to consider it as an engagement in any form; but right or no right, I do consider it an engagement. I'm willing to wait for her all my life, and I'm sure that she will never care for any other fellow — she's not that kind of woman. If I don't get her, she'll never marry any one."

"Oh, that would be dreadful!" said Miss Pamela, not bitterly nor in irony, but speaking with simplest honesty, the light of genuine pity shining in her pleasant, high-bred face. To her it did seem sad that so sweet and beautiful a creature as Faith Ruthven should find no mate in life. There was nothing in the case that suggested to her any similarity to her own.

"Now, Mr. Ruthven doesn't so much object to me specifically," went on Jack, wondering just how much he was lying: "he objects to me on general principles. I'm only a poor artist, you know —"

"I'm sure I think you're a very good one," said Miss Pamela warmly, and utterly disconcerted him for a moment. The poor people whom she had met in life, though they were rich beside veritable paupers, were people whose poverty was to them, in their class of society, a pinching reality, something that put them at a disadvantage among their luckier peers. With her utter ignorance of money matters, Miss Pamela could not associate the idea of poverty

with the best-dressed young idler in Newport. Seeing the outward signs of wealth about Mr. Carnegie, she applied his language in a different sense.

"I mean I'm not rich, you know," Jack explained, somewhat uneasily; "I'm not poverty-stricken, and I won't have to carry Faith to a cottage, or anything of that sort; but I'm not a match, you see, in a worldly way. And then, besides, Mr. Ruthven doesn't think much of artists."

"Oh, but you're not an artist — not in that way, I mean," she added, feeling that she had made another blunder. She did not often stumble in this way, but her present position was new to her. She had received the confessions of a hundred girls in love, but no young man had as yet made her his *confidante*. "You weren't always an artist, and I'm sure Mr. Ruthven cannot quarrel with your family."

"My poor father — " began Jack.

But here Miss Pamela could make no blunder.

"Your poor father, Mr. Carnegie, was my father's best friend. We all knew what he was, and Mr. Ruthven knows as well as any one. I always heard papa speak of Mr. Carnegie as the best and most honorable of men. You mustn't think that anybody ever doubted that."

"Mr. Ruthven doubts a great many things," said Carnegie gloomily.

"You are too sensitive, I think," murmured Miss Pamela diffidently; "are not you a little — morbid?"

"Perhaps. But whether that influences him or not, Mr. Ruthven does not want me for a son-in-law. And, Miss Pamela, I am going to marry his daughter!"

"I believe you will marry her," said the gentle old maid, gazing admiringly at the handsome and energetic young fellow before her.

"I will with your help," he returned. She drew back a little with a sudden timidity. He saw it, and made a vigorous assault on her sympathies. He tried to put before her, in as favorable a light as possible, his rather venturesome and doubtful plan of action, and, to cover up its weakness, disarmed her reason by an appeal to her emotions. He told her how he loved Faith, how sure he felt of her love, how bitter was their parting to both their hearts. In his conversation up to this point, he had spoken with an enforced simplicity and self-restraint, for he knew that strong passions, or at least strong expressions of passion, were out of fashion in Miss Pamela's world; but now he forgot himself, and spoke with all the fire and feeling of his love. It startled Miss Pamela, but it did not offend her. She sat back in her chair, and admired and sympathized. She thought of a certain poor half-lover she had had, once upon a time — a gawky, ill-fed seventh cousin, or something of the sort, who had never declared himself. Nobody but Miss Pamela and the youth himself had ever guessed that there was a spice of romance in their acquaintance; but the recollection had been dear to Pamela's heart for

twenty years. She wondered how she would have felt had she ever had a chance to listen to the open and fervent wooing of a gallant like this. And though to her fate had allotted nothing better than a penniless hobbledehoy who had never found his tongue, she did not for an instant grudge Faith Ruthven her splendid and eloquent lover.

"You'll help me?" he cried, when he had poured out as much of his heart's fulness as he had words for.

She answered him promptly and earnestly:

"I will do my best to help you both, Jack — Mr. Carnegie."

"'Mr. Carnegie'! Why don't you call me Jack? You used to when I was a boy."

"Yes, but now —"

"Why not now? Am I too big a boy?"

"Not exactly that; but I thought — it didn't seem as if I had — exactly a — right."

And she bowed her gray head to hide a faint flush on the smooth old cheek.

"Why not a right, indeed?" demanded Jack as he seized her hand and overwhelmed her with thanks.

"The dear old girl!" he thought: "what *was* she blushing about, and why should she want to be formal with me? She had some reason, I know. I never shall understand those demi-semi-hemi-tones in women."

He was accustomed to crediting Cecil Kent with a profound scientific knowledge of the female heart,

"The fellow hasn't a bit of sentiment," Jack would say; "but he knows women like a book." Perhaps Kent would have guessed, and rather from a gentle sympathy than from any analytical reasoning, that Miss Pamela felt it a profanation of another's holy right to use the familiar name sacred to love and Faith Ruthven.

But Jack did not long trouble himself about the subtleties of Miss Pamela's sensitiveness. He devoted himself to making his demands upon her goodness seem fairly reasonable and practicable, for he had a certain fear that she might "weaken," as he expressed it to himself, and back out when it really came to action.

He need not have distressed himself. Miss Pamela was his ally, heart and soul. Men have written love-letters for other men, and for mere friendship's sake have thrown into the work the fervid ingenuity of personal interest. Miss Pamela's living sympathy made her one with Faith Ruthven, and her own pulses tingled with the pain of the girl's wounded heart. Had it been she herself from whom a cruel parent strove to tear this dear and delightful lover, she could not have been more hurt and indignant.

That night when she went to bed, after reading one of Keble's hymns and the collect for the preceding Sunday, her regular stint of evening devotion, Miss Pamela interrogated her conscience as to whether it was right for her to act the spy under

any circumstances whatever. Fortunately for Jack Carnegie, she fell asleep before her sense of sin had time to weaken her determination.

And the very next afternoon she gave Jack a piece of information.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"HEADED OFF."

SPRINGFIELD, Massachusetts, is a pleasant place even in midsummer, and a town of some business importance; but for neither business nor pleasure would Mr. Ruthven stay in Springfield longer than over night. On the morning of the day after he left Newport he was in Saratoga, in that part of the summer city almost unknown to the sojourners in the great hotels, the part lying west of the long station. He was waiting on the platform of another station, of a much more modest order — waiting for the Adirondac train. To Mr. Ruthven's dissatisfied eye it looked as if he might have a long time to wait. It was a forlorn little railroad, and, although he had his ticket in his pocket, he was haunted with a vague fear that the train for which he was waiting might have long ago discontinued running, somewhere up in the Adirondac wilds, from sheer loneliness and lack of business.

But after a while three fellow-passengers arrived, a family from the backwoods who had been a-pleasuring "down to Sa'togy." Then, as if the distant engineer had in some way learned that the prospects

of traffic were brightening up, the train unexpectedly appeared, and Mr. Ruthven took the most comfortable seat in the centre of the middle car, on the shady side. He had the morning papers, but he did not care to read them. The train gave no signs of starting off, and he amused himself by looking out the window and lazily wondering what dividends the stockholders in the road were accustomed to get, and whether this particular train was really waiting beyond the schedule time in the hope of getting another chance passenger. He was also interested in the conversation of the family on the other side of the car.

"Well, now, mother," said the old man, "you've ben ther, 'n' it's cost a heap of money, 'n' I hope you'll be content to stay to hum for a spell."

"Lor, now, father," responded his wife in an aggrieved tone, "how you do talk! Jussif we come here all along of *me*, when you knowed it was for Ann My-randy's sake, an 'twarn't no moren right by the pore child. She ain't never seen nothin' of the world. Why, she ain't seen the haff of what I'd seed when I was her age. Father he used to take us down to Ballston twicet a year, an' I'd ben to Albany at *her* age, 'n' Schenectady, fer to see Uncle Bartholomew, and sister Jane she'd ben to Buffalo an' was a-goin' to York, on'y she took sick of the vari'loid. To hear how you talk — jussif goin' for a spell to Sa'togy was enough to last a girl all her lifetime. Father he took us to Sa'togy too — "

"Board warn't no two dollars 'n' a haff a day in

Sa'togy when youse a gal, mother," observed the old man dryly.

"Law me, now, father, to hear you talk! Why, folks 'd think I was most a hundred. You ain't so dreffle old yourself," the wife rejoined, with a furtive glance toward Ruthven, who pretended to be reading his paper, though the suggestion of a smile parted his lips.

"Well," said the husband, with a grin that bore the same relation to Mr. Ruthven's thin smile as the broad burlesque of a negro minstrel farce does to the high comedy of a French *proverbe*, "mebbe not, mebbe not, mother; but I'm dern sure I be a sight nigher the rear eend 'f a hunderd then I am the fore."

The good woman threw herself back in her seat, and twitched at her linen duster with a movement of annoyance.

"Ann My-randy," asked the father, "be you satisfied with what you've seen of Sa'togy, or be you a-hankerin' after York and London, and Paree and Con-stan-ti-nople?" and he smiled broadly at this last ponderous effort at humor.

"I liked it," replied the girl. She was freckled, and had thin and wispy hair of the color of tow. She spoke with a sulky bashfulness, relapsed into silence for a minute, and then said, with a tone of injury in her voice, —

"Elmiry Danvers she staid to the Gran' Junion Hotel when her folks was here."

"So you've ben a-tellin' me," said her father

complacently; "so you've ben a-tellin' me, moren once. Ebenezer Danvers is a mighty proud man when he gits down to Sa'togy in the summer. But I suspicion he kinder takes it outen his feed doorin' the winter. I've heerd tell that-a-way. And mebbe when Ebenezer Danvers pays your father thatther morgige of hisn that he give him four year ago this hayin', mebbe you'll git a-taken down to the Gran' Junion, too, Ann My-randy."

Miss Ann Miranda had no more to say for herself; but her mother gave the duster another twitch, and asked of the ceiling of the car, —

"When be they a-goin' to start, I wonder."

"Putty soon, putty soon," replied the old man encouragingly. Safe in his position of supreme authority and control of the privy purse, he could afford to smile at all the petty forms of annoyance which his womankind could inflict upon him.

He got up and went to the front platform and looked out for a moment.

"They're a-gittin' in a hull heap o' freight," he said as he returned; "for them folks up to the hotel, I jedge. They'll be a crowdin' up our way putty soon, thicker'n crows around a corn-shuck. I hear Loozerne's full a-ready."

Mr. Ruthven's smile vanished. Luzerne was his destination.

"We don't want nothin' of 'em, do we, mother?" concluded the old man, sinking heavily into his seat.

"'Cept 'twas for company for Ann My-randy," was the wife's saving clause. "Law knows I don't

want to take no boarders; but Ann My-randy orter see folks."

"Guess Ann My-randy wouldn't see much 'f city-folks. City-folks kinder bunch by 'emselves; an' they hev a right. They wouldn't do Ann My-randy no good, nuther. On'y git her sot on noo dresses 'n' bunnits 'n' crinnerleens."

"'F you had your way, Josiah Reeves," said his wife, provoked into a more direct and personal address than the familiar household title permitted, "Ann My-randy wouldn't see no one."

"Guess she'll look after that herself," replied Josiah with a chuckle, and directed his wife's attention to the young lady, who had crossed the car to stare out the window at what was going on at the further end of the platform. As he spoke, she turned around, and piped with animation, —

"Oh, there's an orfle lot of trunks. Mebbe some 'f them 's comin' to us. Mis' Hoskins was expectin' boarders to-day — Phœbe Nash tol' me so, in her letter."

Miss Ann Miranda abbreviated Phœbe to "Feeb."

Ruthven glanced out of the window, and saw the last of the trunks violently hurled into the caboose car.

"Them's for Loozerne," said the father; "I seen the marks. Take your head in outen the winder, Ann My-randy."

The whistle blew, and the train started, rattling over the ill-ballasted roadway with a clattering and a jolting that drove Ruthven to his papers and his

pocket flask of brandy, and he heard no more of the conversation of the family of Josiah Reeves, who finally landed at a lonely station, where a farm-hand with a farm-wagon was waiting for them. Gazing out as the train began to rattle on again, Ruthven saw Miss Ann Miranda looking wistfully back at the last link that bound her tc civilization and luxury — the railroad to Saratoga.

The Millers had recommended Luzerne as a quiet and comfortable place for a brief retirement from the excitements and exactions of life in New York and Newport. It was not too dull for existence; the best hotel was supposed to be fairly well kept, the air was healthy, there were a few "nice people" to be found there, and the rest might easily be avoided. It would be just the place for dear Faith to rest and regain her color. Ruthven jumped at the chance, and set out on his journey of inspection. If the Millers thought that Faith was pale and nervous, her father lived in constant terror of an all-betraying breaking-down of her health and her courage.

He rather liked the look of Luzerne when he got out at the station; but there was a primitiveness, so to speak, about the scenery that marred its beauty, to his mind. It suggested fried beefsteaks. He could not tell how, but it certainly did.

In a cross between a stage and a carryall, he was jolted up a hill, along a turbulent little river that tumbled over what might be a natural fall, but what Mr. Ruthven feared was a dam, to the door of a

somewhat pretentious wooden hotel on the bank of a very pretty little lake — a mere toy lake it seemed, in that land of high hills, with the blue Adirondacs glooming close by.

A broad hall ran through the centre of the hotel. Here Ruthven found the office and a clerk, who dropped his brummagem superciliousness upon recognizing a superior both in kind and in degree. Mr. Ruthven first assured himself that there were still good quarters to be had, and that, although dinner was served in the middle of the day, after the fashion of the barbarians, he could, by paying extra for it, have a special dinner served for his "party" at supper time. Then he told the clerk he would stay to the midday meal, to see how he liked the table, and then he graciously accepted a suggestion from the young man, and passed on through the hall to take a nearer view of the toy lake.

As he drew near to the shore, he discovered Mr. Kent, seated upon a bench, mending a lawn-tennis racket for a very small boy.

He stopped short, amazed not merely at meeting Kent, but at finding him employed in this act of homely benevolence. He had always given in an unthinking adhesion to the popular idea that Kent was a man whose finely developed brain had provided him with a moral and social code which supplied a natural deficiency in the way of affections and emotions. There was, perhaps, in his discovering Kent in the act of stringing a bat for a small boy, nothing to undermine the foundations of this

belief; but Mr. Ruthven felt that from that day on he could never be absolutely sure of Kent.

"I didn't expect to meet you here," he said, when Kent looked up and recognized him.

"Oh, yes," Kent answered in his matter-of-fact way; "I'm here with the Swifts, putting in a little vacation."

He had risen to shake hands, but immediately sat down again, and resumed his work. Ruthven, rather discomposed by this new intelligence, took a seat upon the same bench.

"Indeed," he inquired; "but I didn't know they were here, either."

"We only came a week ago. Mrs. Swift had friends here, and her physician ordered mountain air for her."

"I didn't know Mrs. Swift was — er — ill."

"I don't think she is ill," said Kent; "but we are all tired of Mount Desert, and Swift and I can run up the mountains from here and do a little shooting out of season. It's not a bad place. Are you coming here?"

He asked the question simply and directly. Ruthven wondered how much Kent knew of what in his own thoughts he termed "the trouble," but he felt that it was extremely unlikely that his wonder would ever be lessened.

"No, I'm not coming here," he answered, rather shortly; "I was at Saratoga, and I ran up here with some idea of using the place as a base of supplies for a little trip to the Adirondacs — thought of leav-

ing my trunks here, you know; but I don't believe it will do at all. Too primitive, altogether, too primitive."

"It's much more primitive up in the woods," said Kent, with a smile, as he bent to draw the last string taut. "There's your racket, Willy. Cut along and win a game for me."

"Thank you, Mr. Kent!" said the small boy as he darted off.

"Yes," Ruthven assented uncomfortably; "it *is* very — er — wild up there, I have no doubt. But I had half an idea that it would do me good. I am feeling remarkably — er — unstrung. I need exercise and open air and bad food, and all that sort of thing."

"Where have you left Miss Ruthven?"

"In Newport — staying with friends."

"Oh!" said Kent, and raised his eyebrows slightly.

"No," Ruthven went on, as though pursuing one train of thought; "I don't like the place at all. I'm sure it won't do for me. And, by the way, if I want to catch my train back, I shall have to start. When does that — er — abominable vehicle return to the station, do you know?"

"It goes back to catch the afternoon mail — somewhere about four, I believe."

"Then I shall have to engage a carriage," said Mr. Ruthven decidedly; "I suppose I can get one."

"Certainly. Here Willy!" Kent shouted to the

small boy, who was testing the repaired bat with a large stone; "come here a moment."

The small boy approached.

"Oblige me by going to the clerk and asking him to have a chaise harnessed up to take this gentleman to the station at once."

"Immediately," Ruthven added; "tell him I must start at once. Do you hear?"

The small boy turned on him with a look of infinite scorn.

"I don't know *you*," he said; "but if Mr. Kent wants me to go, I will."

"Hurry up," said Kent; "I'll hold your bat till you come back."

The boy scudded off, and Kent turned to the elder gentleman with a smile.

"He does know you. That's little Crawford, the son of your next-door neighbor. He doesn't like being taken for a servant."

"I'm sure I beg his pardon — common-looking little devil — takes after his mother. She was from Cincinnati, or some such place. I wonder if he'll get me that carriage. I don't care to miss my train."

"I doubt if you'll catch it at this time of day," said Kent; but he made no further attempt to delay the new-comer's departure. "Come to the house, and I'll hurry them up."

They walked up the slope toward the veranda of the hotel, and at the corner came upon a large wagon full of trunks which had just arrived from the station — the trunks that had come up on the train with Mr. Ruthven.

As they drew nearer, the elder gentleman stopped short and put his hand to his head, bewildered as though a bad dream had suddenly fallen upon his waking mind. He recognized the trunks as a detachment of that mighty collection of luggage with which he had recently made acquaintance at Newport.

There was a horrible likeness between his encounter with Jack Carnegie and this his second meeting with the trunks; only that on this occasion it was Kent, instead of Carnegie, who stood by his side, carelessly directing the porters.

"Put those things all in the main hall," he said, "I can't tell you yet where they are to go."

He wheeled around and spoke to Mr. Ruthven:

"Jack Carnegie's traps. He sent them up here to my care."

"Is *he* coming here?"

"So it seems."

"Why, I — I left him at Newport."

"I supposed he was there, from his letter."

"Well," said Mr. Ruthven grimly, as he recovered himself, "I hope you'll have a very pleasant time together. Remember me to the Swifts, will you? I'm sorry I can't wait to see them. Hope you'll have a pleasant time!"

And he hurried up the steps of the veranda, and was stopped at the top to reply to Kent's inquiry, —

"How did you leave Miss Ruthven?"

"Quite well, thank you. *Good*-by!"

He went within and made the clerk's life a burden

until the chaise was brought to the door. Then he hurried away, luncheonless, but only too glad to escape.

"What an infernal nest!" he thought. "By Jove, it was lucky that I came up myself to see what things were like. If it had all been pre-arranged, they couldn't have made a more annoying combination. I'm glad, anyway, that I know where that fellow Carnegie is to be. I wonder if he suspected that I had my eye on this place? Impossible — er — impossible!"

Mr. Ruthven had asked his friends to say nothing whatever about the real destination of his journey to Faith, and they had said nothing. He forgot that he had laid this injunction upon them in the course of a general conversation, held upon their own veranda, and that Miss Pamela Carrington was sitting upon the veranda at the time. Mr. Ruthven had been for so many years accustomed to look upon Miss Pam as a nonentity that he could not even take her into his calculations. Had he glanced in her direction while he was speaking, even his pre-occupied eyes might have noted that the dear old girl's cheeks were flushing with shame for the dishonorable act she was at that moment guilty of in the furtherance of her honorable mission.

But Mr. Ruthven guessed nothing of this. He waited three hours for a train, got back to Saratoga, tired, cross and hungry. He went to the Clarendon, found there some acquaintances of an uncongenial set, ate an imprudent dinner, which promptly

disagreed with him, dropped into the club-house in the evening and lost fifty dollars, decided that Saratoga was a very vulgar place, and began his journey back to Newport the first thing the following morning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CASE OF DESPERATION.

MR. RUTHVEN was not the only person who had been surprised by Kent's turning up at Luzerne, and by his unusual sociability. Adelaide Swift lived in a state of constant wonderment mixed with terror. She found herself living on terms of amiable acquaintance with a man who had distinctly declared himself her enemy — her antagonist at least — and had threatened to force her to a confession which meant nothing short of ruin. How it had come about she could not have told. She had had no part in it. She had merely submitted to circumstances.

Kent had returned from Boston, had met her husband by accident, and the two men had at once renewed their friendship. Adelaide knew that there had been some cause of quarrel between them, what, she had no idea, and could only torment herself with agonizing guesses. Her mind was now relieved on that score. Whatever it was that had come between them, it was by this time a dead issue. Never since her marriage had she known the two men to be so friendly. They were constant companions,

and during the last fortnight of their stay in the city, Kent dined at the Swifts' no less than six times.

So far as things outward and visible went, Adelaide had to confess that this state of affairs rendered her life much more comfortable. Her husband was oftener at home than was his wont; he did not stay out so late, and she knew that Kent would not let him get into any serious mischief. But in secret she suffered torments. Had Kent deliberately laid out a plan of punishment, he could not have taken a more effective course. What did it all mean? Adelaide asked herself. How much did the man know? What did he mean to do? If he was planning her discomfiture, how long would it be before the blow fell? Thus she sat upon the anxious-seat, and grew pale and thin and querulous, and would not go to Newport or to Mount Desert or to Europe, and finally worried her physician into sending her to Luzerne, of which she knew nothing save that it was "poky," and not at all a place where Kent would be likely to follow her.

But he did follow her; had he wished to avoid it he would have had difficulty. Swift would not part from him, and declared in the end that Adelaide should find an aunt or a female cousin to take her to Luzerne; that he was going where his chum went. He made this declaration separately to Kent and to Adelaide, and Kent at once announced his readiness to go to Luzerne. The gratification of her wish under these circumstances was another drop of gall in Adelaide's cup.

The fact was, Swift had been very miserable after his little break with Kent. There was a very respectable element of affection in his fear and respect for his mentor. The men who habitually play with the affections of women and hold them in light esteem are the very men who conceive almost passionately strong attachments to friends of their own sex. They often infuse into their regard for other men a confidence that is all but pathetic. Accustomed to deal with women whose lightly given love can rarely be counted upon for any length of time, they get an idea that all the honor and fidelity in humanity is on their own side of the house, and they trust other men, especially men of a different sort from themselves, with a blind reliance. Swift had been less hurt by Kent's harsh words than by the thought that the man he trusted was willing to betray him. Swift would have as soon looked to see the foundations of the earth shaken. For one man to "give away" another man was the blackest crime in his calendar, and he was overjoyed when he had reason to believe that Kent's threats were born of sudden excitement, and not of a set purpose.

Their accidental meeting had been formal at first; then Swift had been stirred to remonstrance, and Kent had expressed a qualified contrition, which was quite enough for the satisfaction of the other; for Swift had found a motive for his friend's action — a motive in which he could not for some time believe; but which he settled on at last as probable, though surprising.

He had come to the conclusion that Kent was in love with Miss Ruthven. This struck him as highly humorous. It was hard to imagine Kent in love at all; but Kent in love with a girl scarce three seasons out of school was simply a grand joke. He was very sorry that he could not confide it to any one. He chuckled over it privately, and sometimes smiled at Kent's back in a knowing and mysterious way; but he kept his own counsel, and even repressed a wild temptation to let Adelaide into the jest.

And so they all went up to Luzerne together. It was a healthful and quiet retreat; but Adelaide had little benefit from the change of air. She had, of course, got past the period of active apprehension. Kent did not worry her in any way. She sometimes asked herself if she had not fancied the whole scene in the little reception-room. Of course she as often answered herself that there was no mistake whatever about it. Kent was a mystery. He was more amiable than she had ever seen him before; he was courteous and kind to her, and acted, in general, as though nothing had ever occurred to make a terrible secret between them. He made himself agreeable to her at all times, and if he intentionally avoided seeing her alone, she could not prove it to herself.

After a while this anxiety, great as it was, became a side-issue. She had time to think over the one misery of her life. She was like a boxer, who, having struck a foul blow, has been summarily pun-

ished by the bystanders, and reflects in sore and defeated loneliness over the consciousness of his own weakness which prompted him to use unfair means of defence. The pains of suspense and fear which she was now suffering, for having attempted to right her wrong in a most illegitimate manner, only served to impress upon her her utter helplessness and hopelessness. There were hours when she felt that she did not care whether her escapade were found out or not. Her lonely heart was weighed down by so great a burden of neglect that a little added weight of disgrace would be a trivial matter.

This was naturally not a healthy frame of mind for a young woman under thirty, handsome, clever, and with an unimpaired constitution. Adelaide moped, and knew she was moping. Now and then she thought of going to Newport or Mount Desert to seek an artificial distraction. But when she pondered further, she was glad of the comparative solitude of Luzerne. In her morbid condition, it seemed to her that everybody noticed her husband's neglect, and that the fewer witnesses it had, the better for her.

In reality, Swift's conduct was by no means so bad. Without attracting any one's notice, Kent managed to keep him pretty well in order. He probably was as attentive in his show of affection for his wife as any other husband in the hotel. Only Adelaide and Kent knew how hollow that show was. Swift himself did not. His love for her was not dead, although it had certainly gone fast asleep.

But there was nothing at present to wake it. Jealousy had in some measure roused it on that night in the studio; but the subsequent course of events had suffered it to sink back into slumber.

Mr. Ruthven's brief visit exercised an influence on affairs at Luzerne. It gave Kent an opportunity to strike the first blow in his campaign, for he had laid out a campaign, as well as Carnegie, although their plans of action, or rather of inaction, differed as widely as the natures of the two men.

"Mr. Ruthven was here just now, and wished to be remembered to you," said Kent maliciously, when they all met at dinner.

Adelaide started so violently that he feared he had succeeded too well, and that the woman would betray herself. He regretted his little stroke.

Meanwhile, the man who was both the principal and the approximate cause of all the trouble, devoured, with slow and lingering pleasure, a mouthful of salad of his own making, before it occurred to him that the presence of Mr. Ruthven implied the presence of Mr. Ruthven's daughter, and that the presence of Miss Ruthven for any length of time would be somewhat embarrassing to him, and probably productive of a most exasperating effect upon his wife.

"The deuce!" he said; "are *they* coming here?" Then it occurred to him, too late, that he might have confined his inquiry to the movements of Mr. Ruthven alone.

"He came up to inspect the place," was Kent's unsatisfactory reply.

"Why, look here," Swift went on, slowly taking in the situation, "this place will never do for old man Ruthven — he wants to be fed on candied rose-leaves off a golden platter."

"He made no stipulations for that style of diet," said Kent, bent on tantalizing Adelaide with a horrible uncertainty. He saw that she had recovered herself sufficiently to stand this course of discipline.

"Oh, this kind of thing won't suit *him*," Swift continued, in growing disgust, "you ought to have told him so, Kent."

Adelaide's face was pale. Her dark eyes flashed anxiously from her husband's face to Kent's, and back again. On the one she saw a rather stupid and wholly innocent placidity, on the other a veiled malice, which she considered positively demoniac. Here she broke into the conversation:

"How can you be so dull, Robert! can't you see it's only one of Mr. Kent's jokes?"

And she cast across the table at Kent a look which said that she thought it a joke in very bad taste.

"What d'ye mean, Kent?" the bewildered husband inquired; "hasn't old Ruthven been here?"

"Certainly he has. If Mrs. Swift doubts my word, I shall be happy to show her his name on the register."

"Is he staying here? Where are his rooms?" Adelaide put in, entirely unconvinced.

"He has no rooms —" began Kent.

"Ah!" Adelaide felt sure that it was a joke now. "Perhaps he will sleep on a hammock on the piazza?"

"Possibly," said her tormentor.

"Why hasn't he rooms?" Swift put the question point-blank, and got a direct answer.

"Because he didn't engage any. He registered only for dinner."

Swift gazed around the large dining-room. Adelaide looked down at her plate. Kent judged by her bent brows that he had moved her enough for his purpose, and he blandly told his story of Ruthven's flying visit.

"Yes," he concluded, "the place was too primitive for him, so he's gone back to Newport. But he particularly charged me to remember him to you both."

Swift, having recovered from his first fright, remarked, with a too shameless mendacity, that he was sorry he hadn't seen Ruthven; Adelaide's eyes flashed a lightning glance of scorn and contempt at the unmoved Kent, and then they chatted briskly on indifferent subjects until the close of the meal.

If Kent's desire was to wake a little anxiety in the bosom of both members of the Swift family, he was successful. As soon as the men had found a shady place to smoke, Robert inquired, —

"What was that old beggar up here for, Kent?"

Kent's reply was in a popular form of words, to the effect that he staked his hereafter on his ignorance. The subject, apparently, was not important to him. Swift stared in silence. Was it possible

that Kent cared nothing for Faith Ruthven? When Swift's affections were touched, even the great-aunt of the "object" was a person of interest. If, when he was making love to Adelaide, the young lady's guardian had come on a tour of inspection to the hotel where he was staying, he would have vied with a professional touter in his endeavors to induce the old gentleman to patronize the establishment. Swift made up his mind that Kent was a cold-blooded paradox; and having found this phrase, which had an epigrammatic ring to it, he accepted it as the final flower of character-study, and was satisfied, and turned his thought to other themes.

Adelaide was not so easily disposed of. Kent kept out of her way for a while, wishing her to have time to reflect upon the hint she had had of the dangers which the chances of every day held in store for her; but she found him, late in the evening, down by the water side, examining a new boat which Swift had just received from New York, a light, graceful, cedar-built craft, scarcely heavier than the ordinary "working-boat" of the athlete.

"Won't you take me out on the lake, Mr. Kent?" she asked, half appealingly.

"Certainly. You don't mind my smoking?"

"Of course not." Adelaide was not utterly ignorant of that flavor which a cigarette has at the end which is not alight.

He helped her in, and, foreseeing a display of emotion, pulled with long and steady strokes toward the least frequented part of the little lake.

She sat for a while in silence, trailing one hand in

the moonlit water, which swaled in spreading silver from the bows of the boat. From behind them, in the darkening distance, came occasional gusts of music. There was dancing at the hotel. At the further end of the lake they heard faintly shouts of laughter and snatches of song, where a couple of boating-parties were profaning the night. On the nearer shore the katydids piped and the locusts creaked; but the water seemed to surround the boat with a broad belt of intervening silence within which the soft pulse and plash of the oars were the only sounds that caught the ear.

"Why did he go away — Mr. Ruthven?" she asked, looking up for an instant.

"Because he didn't like what he saw, I suppose."

"And why did he select this place, of all places in the world? What suggested it?" she demanded, fixing her gaze on the rower.

"Saw it in a guide, perhaps," he answered idly; "or some fellow told him — "

"I won't have it!" she broke out suddenly, her eyes full of fury, her face white, and her breath coming hard.

"Won't have what?"

"This — this persecution — this infamous persecution! It's cruel — it's unmanly — if you weren't a coward you wouldn't *stoop* to it!" she cried, with fine feminine vehemence.

"I don't quite know what you mean," Kent said. He stopped rowing, and crossed the oars in the rowlocks.

"You do!" she returned, almost sobbing in her

rage; "you've followed me up here to annoy me and disgrace me."

"Nothing of the sort, Mrs. Swift," he answered grimly.

"You think you can spy upon me and threaten me, and make me ruin myself. You want me to tell my husband that I was in that room that night. It's false! I was not."

"I want you to tell nothing but the truth."

"The truth?" she repeated, after a little choking pause: "I'll tear my tongue out before I tell it to *him*. I meant no wrong when I went there — it was *his* fault — he was driving me mad with his neglect — but God knows I meant no wrong — God knows I meant no wrong! I've done nothing to be tortured for — like this."

She was wholly broken down now, and she crouched in the stern; her arms were stretched out before her, her hands were clasped, and her head drooped on her breast. Then, as he sat looking at her, she half rose, with a quick movement like a snake uncoiling, and made a mad plunge over the side of the boat.

Before the water had reached beyond her wrists, Kent's arm was under her. With one fierce, brief strain he threw her back and righted the boat, which had dipped to the gunwale, and would have gone under had it not been for the projecting blade of the oar across which he had bent. He stood erect, staring in startled horror at the woman opposite him, wringing her wet hands, her face ghastly white in the moonlight, her eyes full of a wild trouble, a low moan coming from between her pale drawn lips.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO ALLIANCES.

IT broke upon Kent's mind with convincing force, that he had been unjust to Adelaide. The woman he had imagined her would have been incapable of this emotion and this impulse; and there was something in her speech and manner which told him her suffering sprang rather from her husband's neglect than her own wrong-doing.

A pang of something like remorse smote him; but it was for the wrong he had done her in his thoughts, and not for the severity of his treatment. *That* was a matter easily atoned for.

He took her hands and forced her down into the seat in the stern.

"I want you to be quiet, Mrs. Swift," he said, when he saw that she had in some measure recovered herself: "you have nothing more to fear from me."

"I don't care what becomes of me," said Adelaide, after a few seconds of silence. Her mad impulse was past, and she felt herself all the more feeble for that moment of unnatural strength.

"I hope you do," Kent answered with a grave good nature. He saw a clearer future before him.

"Why should I?"

"Because other people do. Your husband among the number."

Adelaide made a gesture of impatient negation, which Kent took for what it was worth. He knew that the poor creature had spent her strength; that she had made her weak protest against fate, and that now her weakness cried aloud for any comfort that he could give her.

"Indeed he does," Kent continued; "and he'll never forgive me if I bring you back a victim of pneumonia."

He rowed after her light worsted shawl, which had fallen into the water, and was hanging upon a rock near the shore, whither the waves started by the movement of the boat had borne it. The flimsy thing was soaked in every fibre. He wrung it out and threw it into the bows.

"Put this over you," he said: "you mustn't catch cold."

As he spoke, he took off his coat and hung it over her shoulders. Then with a huge silk handkerchief he gently dried her hands, using a quiet force which she could not resist.

"But *you* will catch cold," she objected.

"Mrs. Swift, in the course of my checkered existence, I have caught several colds. So far, none has availed to bear me to the dark and silent tomb. I think I can take the chances better than you."

She laughed feebly, feeling that he had given her the cue. She was too tired, too exhausted from her

sudden access of passion, to reason deeply about anything; but she felt that Kent was no longer her enemy. She did not too closely inquire how the change had come about; but she understood with a new sense of relief and comfort that she had a friend by her side.

The little act of commonplace courtesy, the few words of commonplace levity, did much to bring her back to herself.

"You must take a good dose of brandy when you get back, and go to bed at once," Kent went on to say; and she was forced to answer him, and to chatter about sanitary precautions for a few minutes, while he rowed toward the hotel.

When this little conversation flagged, her companion rested on his oars, looked straight at her, and said, —

"Now tell me all about it."

"There's not much to tell." Her head drooped once more, and her hand trailed in the water.

"Well, tell me what there is. We've got to understand each other, you and I. Come, now; be a good girl, and tell me the whole truth. Don't disguise anything — let's have the whole business. Remember, now — if you are only frank and fair with me, you'll find you are speaking to a friend."

His words were almost an echo of her thoughts. So far as his injunction went, he need hardly have spoken. She had made up her mind to confess to him, and she already trusted him with a trust as implicit as if she had had every possible proof of

his discretion and fidelity. And his tone of genial authority made her task the easier.

Brokenly, picking her way through a network of awkward admissions, she began to tell him her story. There was not much to tell, indeed, in the way of action; but there was a woeful deal of explanation necessary. She faltered on, in a soft, half-frightened way, alternately accusing and condemning herself, until the tale was told.

Kent drew a long breath. It was better than he had expected. The situation was much less grave. The cause of the disturbance was merely an act of folly, not one of hardened wickedness. He had to deal with a guiltless penitent, instead of a desperate sinner. The task he had set himself was so much the easier. Still there remained much to be done, and he did not quite know how to do it.

"Well?" he said, when Adelaide had made an end.

"Well, do you wonder I wanted to end it all in the water? — and think how you were treating me!" she added, with small regard for the construction of her sentence.

Kent seemingly did not care to turn his thoughts upon this subject.

"I don't see any necessity," he calmly observed, "for your retiring from this vale of tears. That won't right your wrongs in any way. It strikes me that the wisest thing you can do is to look out for some more practical way of getting things into shape."

"Things will never get into shape again," responded Mrs. Swift, with dismal flippancy.

"Let us see. They're not half so bad as they seem. Come, we'll examine the situation, and get home at the same time."

He resumed his rowing, and began his questioning.

"About those letters you got from Carnegie — what have you done with them?"

"I've burnt them up."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, indeed."

"That was discreet."

"I'm afraid," Adelaide murmured, hanging her head, "that it wasn't discretion that made me do it. I couldn't bear the sight of them."

"Why not?"

"Because — well, I found out that I didn't care a bit for him."

"It might have saved trouble if you had found that out before."

She was not angered by this remark. It was the harmless raillery of a friend, and not the sarcasm of an enemy. She gave in a mild assent.

"I wish I had."

"What made you behave so confoundedly ill to Miss Ruthven after — "

"After what she had done for me? Well, *he* was in love with her, and that made me almost crazy. Though I don't suppose it was her fault."

"I should think not!" interposed Kent with emphasis.

"She didn't care for him, perhaps."

"Probably not."

"Well," she said, noting the significance of his tone, "they're all wild about him. Everybody is."

"Great God!" Kent remarked to himself as he looked up at the silent stars.

"I wish he was ugly," she continued, "then I'd have him all to myself."

"Why don't you sponge his face with vitriol while he's asleep," suggested Kent, with such matter-of-fact sincerity that Adelaide shrieked, —

"Oh, don't put such ideas into my head! *Think how he'd look!*"

Thus adjured, Kent could only smile. It occurred to him that Adelaide's ideal of matrimonial felicity would be fully satisfied with a life-size wax doll, modelled according to the strictest rules of masculine beauty, and wound up with a key attached to her wrist.

"Mrs. Swift," he said, abandoning all efforts to enlarge her scope of vision, and moving at once to business, "there seems to be a very bad tangle in our affairs. Suppose you and I try to undo it together?"

But here Kent met with a fresh obstacle. Adelaide was frightened and remorseful; but her remorse was not penitence, and she flatly refused to try to help herself out of her difficulties by any measures involving personal risk.

"It's bad enough as it is," she said.

He labored with her as he rowed back to land;

he argued gently, though persistently, as they sat on the hotel veranda while Adelaide sipped hot lemonade, flavored strongly with the vulgar yet stimulating whiskey of Bourbon County, Kentucky. It was of no avail. The woman's unreasoning obstinacy stopped all further progress like a blank wall in the way.

Kent was by no means discouraged, however. He had already accomplished more than he had hoped for. He was content to take things quietly and await the fullness of time for the accomplishment of his end. And now his course was easier. Adelaide no longer feared and avoided him; on the contrary, her confidence grew with every day, and the terror his quiet determination had previously inspired in her proved an excellent foundation for a new respect and a profound belief in the soundness of his judgment.

Down in Newport, Jack Carnegie saw *his* way by no means so clearly. He had calculated upon Mr. Ruthven going direct to Luzerne. When he learned from Miss Pamela that the old gentleman had come back to the Millers' with an unfavorable report of the place, he guessed at once what had occurred, and he saw that he had shown his hand prematurely. His intention had been to make it appear that he had sent his baggage to Kent a few days before the arrival of the Ruthven family, so that he himself might turn up in due time with the innocent air of a man who is carrying out his regular and long-settled programme. He had even rehearsed

himself for a little scene of surprise when he should encounter Mr. Ruthven, and he was trying to make up his mind as to just how far it would be practicable to throw into that surprise a shade of displeasure which should gently suggest, "*Why* do you go to the places where you must have known I meant to go? Can you not leave an ill-used man to the solitude he seeks?"

Jack literally cursed and figuratively tore his hair when he got a letter from Kent. He had learned of his friend being in Luzerne only from a newspaper item, which said nothing about his companions. When the lover found that he had not only shown his hand, but had shown it for nothing, a mighty rage filled his soul. It had never occurred to him that Mr. Kent's services as escort to Miss Ruthven, on a certain occasion, had come to the knowledge of the father, and he had been congratulating himself on the good luck that supplied him with such an ally at the scene of action. "Kent is the only man of my crowd," he said to himself in his fatuity, "whom that old buffer can even stand. He likes Kent, though, and if he finds him up there, he will take rooms on the spot, and fire the higher æsthetics into poor Cecil for the rest of the summer."

And now profanity alone had power to ease his spirit. He cursed himself right generously for his haste. "I could just as well have waited," was his pleasant reflection, "till I heard from Kent, and saved the whole business."

But it was done now; the hand was shown, and

Jack resolved to lay it on the table and force the play.

"It's a one-sided game of bluff now," he said ruefully to himself; "but I'm not afraid of anything he may have in his hand, and I'm betting all my pile on this game."

This shows that Mr. Carnegie knew something of the great democratic game of America. It may argue a plebeian taste in the young man; but an acquaintance with the great possibilities of draw-poker is not a bad education for a man who has to rely on his own nerve and judgment.

Jack appealed a second time to Miss Pamela.

"I must know where they *are* going," he said. "Of course I can find out after they are gone; but I don't want to attract attention by following them in that open fashion. I must get there before them, and I'm sure the old gentleman will do his best to head me off. He has tripped me up at Luzerne, and he knows my game now."

"Perhaps he didn't see your trunks," said Miss Pamela; "he said nothing to the Millers about it. But then, of course, he wouldn't."

"I should say not."

"But if he has seen them, and if he does know your — plan," Miss Pamela substituted for "game," as being less coarsely suggestive of desperate deeds — "if he does know your plans, I wonder that he doesn't forbid you to meet Faith. But he knew you were going driving with her and the Morrises this morning, and he made no objection."

"No, the sly old scamp," growled Carnegie, to

his *confidante's* horror; "he knows too much for that. He doesn't mean to let me see that he's spotted me."

"If you talk in that way, Jack, as though you were a hardened criminal, you'll frighten me out of our alliance," said Miss Pam, smiling faintly. "I'm trying to do something for an unlucky young lover, not for a — highwayman, or something of that kind, who is engaged in 'games' where people 'spot' him."

"I beg your pardon," cried Carnegie, "I don't want to make you feel like a deep-dyed conspirator — or *trix*, or *tress*, or whatever it is. And I'm grateful enough to you for what you're doing for me. But just help me this one time more, as the children say, and I'll never, never trouble you to do anything for me again — except to dance at the wedding."

Poor Miss Pam laughed and then sighed meekly; and this was the last protest she made against the ignominious task at which Jack had set her; though, perhaps, when she went to bed of nights, she threw a little extra earnestness into the reading of Keble and the collect, and said her simple prayers with a guilty fervor.

Carnegie had guessed aright.

When they met, Ruthven greeted him with an elaborately bland indifference, and Miss Pam reported that he was unquestionably trying to conceal his next move.

"He tells everybody that he has to go back to town on business next week, and that he must take

Faith with him to sign papers and all that. Just as if he'd do such a thing — carry that poor girl back to that horrid old-fashioned part of the city in this weather — for of course it is old-fashioned and stuffy, though we did live there so long, and I was very unhappy when we left. And besides, I know he can't. They have the painters in the house. Willy Ford told me so — he was in town the other day. The Fords live right opposite, you know. I'm sure I don't see how I shall ever find out for you where they *are* going, before they *do* go — and there are only five days more."

It was a fact. The Ruthvens' visit to the Millers had lengthened out far beyond its allotted bounds, and their departure was not to be delayed after the head of the family found a haven of refuge from his daughter's energetic suitor. He found it at last, and the day was set for going.

With a sinking heart Miss Pamela watched the preparations. She had exhausted her few feeble and carefully concealed efforts to get at the truth. Even had she known Faith intimately enough to attempt to "pump" her, the operation would have been useless. Faith knew no more than the rest of the world whither she was to be taken. She was passive in her father's hands, and looked forward with neither joy nor pain to being carried to some place where Jack Carnegie could not follow her, and where, should her courage fail her and the grief in her heart show forth in her face, there would be no familiar eye to note the signal of distress. And this, she surmised, was her father's plan.

But secrecy is an ascetic virtue. It never came out of Sybaris.

Mr. Ruthven betrayed himself at the very last moment when the betrayal could avail Jack Carnegie. The delicate stomach to which he had been so considerate a friend all his days, the stomach he had pampered and petted and made glad with the good things of this world and the fruits of the earth in their season — that stomach worked him a wrong now, and his indulgence of its desires was the cause of his betrayal.

The Ruthvens were to leave Newport on Monday. On Friday night Jack Carnegie received a little note, written in a prim, long-slanting, old-style script which showed certain traces of agitation in the writer.

Careless Jack never guessed in what a tremor of fear and shame that poor little letter was written.

It read:

"NEWPORT, Friday P.M.

"DEAR MR. CARNEGIE, —

"I am not sure, but I think it is a place called Milford — do you know it? He asked Willy Ford who is going back to the city to-night to take an order to Pinard's — I saw the address — it was Milford, Pike County, Pennsylvania — I believe it was marked via Erie Railway — or it may have been Erie Canal —

"Sincerely your friend

"PAMELA CARRINGTON."

"God bless her old soul!" said Jack as he laughed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST FLIGHT.

MR. RUTHVEN took his daughter to the city; but only for a day and a night. And this time they did not pass at home, but went to one of the great hotels which Faith knew only from the outside. The old gentleman grumbled ceaselessly during the period of their stay, while the girl rather enjoyed her brief glimpse at hotel life. She noted with curious eyes the isolation in which each individual and each family group dwelt among the vast and changing crowd, and the careless publicity — which was almost like a strange paradoxical sort of privacy — of their lives. She liked the high-ceiled dining-hall, and the lively waiters who blended efficiency with an independent dignity; she paused on her way to her room to listen to the quick tramp of men's feet in the great marble-paved lobby below, and she fell asleep late at night, lulled by the noise of a distant elevator that sank from roof to cellar with a muffled shuddering fall, and then climbed shiveringly up the tall shaft and checked itself with a soft thud of relief.

In the morning Mr. Ruthven went to the house to

inspect the progress of the repairs, and Faith was left alone. All was new and interesting to her, and, in defiance of her father's injunction, she wandered into the great, cool, cavernous parlors at an hour when she thought they would be deserted, and there she encountered and was forced to reply to the friendly observations of a young lady whose general style was pronounced, and whose hair was yellow and fluffily banged, and who seemed to Miss Ruthven to be at once entertaining, intelligent and self-reliant. She said, and not in answer to any inquiry either, that she was twenty-one years old, that her "pa" was travelling on business in the West, and that she had always lived with "ma" in the very best hotels in the country. She showed a little curiosity about Miss Ruthven's family and career, but it was merely the interest of a person who is accustomed to acquire a great deal of general information, and who takes whatever comes along, and she was quite content to do almost all the talking herself.

As soon as might be, Faith fled from this rather hazardous social connection, and hid herself in her own room. She knew that she had done wrong; but in her heart she had enjoyed this acquaintance of a moment, and she felt the keen joy of a discoverer.

Mr. Ruthven came back at one o'clock, and took her off to lunch at the Brunswick, an arrangement for which she was profoundly grateful, for she was already beginning to fear the strange young lady's bow when they should enter the dining-room.

"We must start this afternoon," said her father. "I hope you have unpacked nothing."

"Nothing," Faith replied. "Where are we going, papa?"

"To Milford, Pennsylvania," he said somewhat awkwardly. "I have made all possible inquiries about the place, and I'm sure you'll find it very pretty and very comfortable. I want to catch the afternoon train, because I'm sure it's going to be — er — very hot here, and I think we'd better be off. I have the tickets."

Faith made no reply. It was painfully clear to her what was in her father's mind; but there was nothing for her to do but to acquiesce.

They took the train to Milford, and through the dull and tiresome journey Faith pretended to read a magazine; but her thoughts were far away, and her spirits were depressed. They did not revive at the sight of Port Jervis, the station where they alighted at evening, a most dismal and dreary spot. From here Mr. Ruthven had expected to take a carriage to Milford; but the regular stage, which usually made its trips to connect with an earlier train, had been delayed an hour by the breaking of an axle, and Faith insisted upon finishing the journey on the top of the cumbrous vehicle. She said that she should enjoy it above all things, and she showed so much determination that her father did not attempt to oppose her, although he did not greatly affect this mode of conveyance, having a distaste for heavy and unyielding springs.

He was rather shy, nowadays, of coming into conflict with his daughter's newly awakened will; and, as he reflected, there was, after all, little choice between the stage and the strange relics of a long-past era in carriage-building which the Port Jervis livery-stables afforded the traveller.

Faith had come to think that her apathetic listlessness was a confession of cowardice, and she was resolved to make a brave showing. So she climbed to the roof of the stage, and chatted merrily with an inquisitive small child as they rolled along the dusty road, smooth with a natural macadamization to which the shaly hills along which it ran lent a generous aid.

Mr. Ruthven had taken quarters at the only place in Milford where he could be absolutely safe from fried beefsteaks and kindred horrors. It was a small and modest hotel kept by a Frenchman, formerly a cook in New York, a place better in deed than in look. Fortunately for his æsthetic sensibilities, Ruthven found that his "party" was not lodged in the hotel proper. Rooms had been engaged at a house a little way down the shady main road. They had the second floor to themselves, with a chamber in the "L" for Faith's maid.

The house was marvelously old-fashioned, with no two rooms on a level. The ceilings were low, the irregular window held small panes of greenish glass. The broad fireplaces had been filled up with brick, and shamefully reduced to meet the exigencies of an anthracite-burning age; but the ravages of modern

economy were concealed by the old "summer pieces" which were fastened in front of them, gorgeous in their coating of florid wall-paper. Mr. Ruthven was sick at heart at sight of those fire-boards, but they amused Faith. The summer-piece in her room bore on it a group of orange-capped fishermen dancing on a yellow beach, by a Prussian-blue sea and under a cobalt sky. The costumes suggested "Masaniello." Mr. Ruthven was favored with a green parrot on a pink ground. In the parlor down-stairs was the national eagle, struggling wildly to keep his footing on a bunch of lightnings of assorted colors.

The old Frenchman had a nice little nondescript meal, something between dinner and supper, for the weary travellers; and the next morning, after they had walked up the street, where the faintest of summer breezes stirred the pendent leaves of the overspreading elms and the stiffly poised flowers of the hollyhocks behind the garden fences, Mr. Ruthven found appetite to eat an excellent omelette for his breakfast, and was moved to express a mild satisfaction with his surroundings.

"Charmingly plain," he said; "but I think it's going to be quite comfortable, and I suppose it must be — er — healthful. Dinner's the test, of course, dinner's the test; but if the dinner is satisfactory, I think the place will do, Faith, my dear."

In the afternoon they wandered through the town, and Mr. Ruthven discoursed most eloquently on the effect of artificial vulgarity in setting off natural beauty.

He had a fair-enough text for his little æsthetic sermon. Milford lies in an angle of the hills, with the Delaware River at the base of the angle, and is, indeed, but a beggarly junction of roads, where the highway coming westward from Port Jervis meets another highway that runs southward down the hills, makes an impetuous dash toward the river, stops short on the lofty bank, as though appalled by the arid and uninviting look of the Jersey flats opposite, and, with a sharp turn, sweeps gracefully off in a long curve to the southwest, running between the river and a line of bluff-faced hills toward the Water-Gap, a day's journey down the river.

The Ruthvens' quarters were at the quiet end of the town, where the road from the east entered. Nearly across the way from them was the court-house — for Milford is a county town. They found it a building as imposing in appearance as its size allowed it to be. It contained the jail, a small but important part, of a severe and simple style of architecture. It showed two grated windows on the street. One of these was empty; but through the bars of the other a plump and rosy young man looked out and exchanged cheery greetings with his fellow-townsfolk.

"Mawnin'!" he called to a farmer who was walking beside an ox-team.

"Mawnin', Jawge," returned the farmer cordially, stopping his team. "Whoa, boss. Seasonable weather."

"I hearn them noo cows o' yourn was sick," said George: "tha' so?"

"Waal, no," answered the farmer, flicking a fly off the off ox; "not what ye might rightly call sick. I guess they'd ben kep' kinder poor down to Maeder's place, 'n' the pastur up my way wuz a sorter too rich for 'em, 'n' they kinder sickened awnto it. I hed Doc Wiley up f'm Jarvis, 'n' he give 'em physic, 'n' charged me four dawllers; but I guess 'twan't what he done 't brung 'em round. I might jes' 'bout 's well 'a' left 'em to nachur — jes' 'bout. How's yore ma?"

"Putty tol'ble," replied George, with a cloud on his round face.

"Ther's a revival up to the Methody church over yawnder," the farmer went on, without indicating any special direction; "'n' I hearn 't Noble Pennypacker's wife gut a change of heart. She ain't missed a revival sence she marrid Noble. I 'spec' he's a trile to her. 'Spose you heerd Chaunce Otis is drinkin' agin', 'n' his wife's wuss 'n ever. Waal, I gotter be gittin' 'lawng awn to Dimmick's."

The farmer and the prisoner nodded to each other; the farmer lifted his whip and cracked it.

"Haw!" he said to one ox, and the quiet beasts swayed lumberingly down the street, with the springless wagon creaking behind them.

When the Ruthvens, who had listened in wonder and amusement to this colloquy, took occasion to inquire about the young prisoner, they learned that he was awaiting trial on nine separate and distinct indictments, for nine separate and distinct felonies and misdemeanors, of all of which he was unques-

tionably guilty. This did not affect his social standing in the community.

Father and daughter walked down the street and found at the corner a stone building whose pretentious newness contrasted unpleasantly with the shabby antiquity of the rest of the town. It was called a "block," and it comprised a general store and the post-office and a clock-tower. Out of the post-office, as they passed, ran a haggard man with a "chin-beard," bearing a heavy package. It was the local editor, who had just received from Chicago his weekly edition of "patent outsides," on the blank part of which labor-saving invention he laboriously imprinted with a hand-press a smudgy chronicle of the deeds and events of Pike County.

Then they idled down the road to the river, a dull and dirty street, redeemed from utter gracelessness only by a few tall trees. On each side were rickety wooden buildings, summer hotels and boarding-houses, with poor little shops in between. But behind them and to the right were glimpses of hill-top and upland, and at the end of the walk were the bluffs that overlooked the river, a bright stream that flowed softly down, cool and deep, and suddenly shoaled and went brawling off under a long white bridge.

As they took their way homeward, they agreed that the town itself had a ram-shackle attractiveness about it, and that had it been even more mean and unlovely than it was, its splendid setting of lush green hill and wood might well have atoned for the one spot that man had made unbeautiful.

As Mr. Ruthven said, it all depended upon dinner. If the dinner was a success, Milford as a whole was a success; and Faith began to pray that the dinner might be a success. She had already a feeling of relief, of greater ease, of something almost like a dawning hope, although she could not well have told why. She certainly did not expect that a miracle would be worked in her favor. Perhaps it was something in the keen clear air, in the careless peace of the place, which affected her spirit through her senses. All Faith knew was that she felt, for the first time in many a week, that the possibility of happiness had not vanished wholly from her life.

Was it a mystery of that exalted sympathy which we call love? Faith asked herself this question an hour or two later, in a state of great perplexity and agitation.

The dinner had proved a success.

"Of course, it is the merest — er — rudimentary style of cooking," the censor summed up; "but it is sound, so far as it goes, and I have no doubt that its very simplicity is wholesome. The man has the right idea — no frying-pan — no leanings toward pastry. And that French waiter really has some notion of what constitutes decent service. We must try and secure him for ourselves alone while we are here."

And Mr. Ruthven left his daughter on the veranda, talking to a friendly old lady from Philadelphia, and went into the men's room of the little hotel — to speak truth, it was a bar-room — and sat him down to smoke his after-dinner cigar.

An unblessed indulgence! Mr. Ruthven's digestion of that successful dinner was suddenly checked. He took up the *Pike County Citizen's Voice*, the inside of which was still wet from the press, for the poor hard-working editor had just finished his weekly task. Ruthven held the paper with the tips of his thin fingers grasping the margin, and cast a supercilious eye over its contents. The "selected" stories and poems on the outside had no attraction for him, and he turned to the ill-printed news of the town, and smiled at the array of names unfamiliar to him which represented the week's additions to the floating population of Milford. He looked down the "local" column, and there, among various announcements to the effect that Mr. Stillwell J. Curtis was about to paint his barn, that the ladies would find a new invoice of calicoes at Pinkham's store, that Mr. Eben C. Lootz called upon the editor, in his sanctum, last Thursday, and presented him with an ear of sweet corn four inches in diameter, and the like, Mr. Ruthven saw a little paragraph that took the condescending smile out of his face. This was the paragraph:

"Mr. John Carrigee, the distinguished New York artist in oil colors, arrived here last week from Newport, R.I., and is spending a few weeks at the Sawkill House. Mr. Carrigee expresses himself highly delighted with the beautiful and picturesque scenery of Pike Co., which, as we have often observed, furnishes a field for the brush and imagination of poet or painter almost unequalled in this section of the country."

If John Carnegie's name had ever filled the speaking trump of Fame, the echoes had not reached the Pike County editor. But he had got quite near enough to the right word to leave no doubt in Ruthven's mind as to the identity of the "distinguished artist in oil colors." The old gentleman threw away his cigar and strode out of the room. He could not trust himself to discuss the matter with Faith. He looked out upon the veranda and told her he was going for a walk, and would see her later in the evening. Then he hurried off to his own room, and there stalked up and down, crushing the paper in his hand, for a good quarter of an hour; by which time Faith came and knocked timidly at the door. She suspected that something had occurred; but when she opened the door she found her father as calm as usual.

"I thought you were going to walk, papa?"

"I am going to walk, my dear. There is no need of — er — following me up in this way. Go back to your friends, I beg. I will see you when I come back."

He took his hat and stick, and went out. Watching from the window, she saw him striding up the road with less dignified grace than was his wont. As she turned back, her eye fell on the crumpled paper. She picked it up and read the item. After that she did not rejoin her new friends, but passed into her own room and sat on the edge of her bed trembling with an excitement which was neither fear nor pain nor joy, but compounded of all three.

Mr. Ruthven walked up the street, outwardly quiet enough, but with more of vulgar rage in his soul than he had ever deigned to feel before. And worse than the anger which tortured him was his sense of helplessness. It was an outrage on the young blackguard's part, of course; but what was to be done in the matter? The fellow had made a daring move, and it was a success. Mr. Ruthven could not take his daughter away now without running the risk of causing talk. That Carnegie had met them at Newport and again here might very well pass for a coincidence in the world's eyes, as matters stood at present; but if Carnegie were to make another attempt, what would be said? And the fellow seemed quite capable of it. It looked to Ruthven as if Carnegie meant to force the direct issue before the world. In the father's mind there even formulated itself a little dialogue between Mr. Jack Carnegie and the beholders of his proceedings. "Yes, I am following this woman about because I love her." "But does she love you?" "Ask her." "But if she loves you, why does she not marry you?" "Her father opposes it." "Why does he oppose it?" "Ask *him*." Thus Mr. Ruthven took a natural but unjust view of the situation. He failed to see that Carnegie's attack was on Faith's heart and not aimed at his own sense of propriety. "I suppose," he put it to himself, "the young cub thinks that if he can keep this up long enough, he will force me to help him and to say that I accept Faith's explanation."

Mr. Ruthven forgot that, far from having refused to accept an explanation from his daughter, he had never dared to force her to give him an explanation. In a negative way he had shown that he believed the girl guilty of a shocking imprudence, but since she had taken the conduct of affairs into her own hands and dismissed her lover, he had been well content to let the case remain unadjudicated.

But now it seemed as though the case would have to be re-opened. Mr. Ruthven was not the man to drag an unpleasant truth out of the darkness of doubt and look at it from all sides, just for his own satisfaction. Had Jack Carnegie disappeared from the scene, so long as the witnesses of his daughter's escapade kept silent — and on *any* hypothesis they must keep silent — he would have quietly let the matter remain a mystery to himself. A skeleton in the closet is very disagreeable, no doubt; but if you can keep the door shut, no one need know that the skeleton is there.

But now — was there collusion between his daughter and Carnegie? Would it really be needful to find out whether she was what she seemed, or whether her life and apparent character were falsehoods? These were pleasant thoughts, indeed, for a father!

He had walked rapidly, and before he had time to pursue his reflections further he found himself on a little bridge at the end of the town. The bridge spanned a tiny creek, and a man was leaning over the low stone parapet and looking down into the water, where a reflex of the rising moon was just

beginning to glimmer. It was not too dark for Mr. Ruthven to see that the man was Jack Carnegie. He walked up to him, and Jack heard him and faced about.

"Good-evening, Mr. Ruthven," he said coolly.

Ruthven did not answer this salutation. He paused for a second, and then said composedly, —

"Mr. Carnegie, will you be so good as to inform me if I am right in considering you a blackguard?"

"I will," was the matter-of-fact answer.

"Well, sir?"

"You are *not*," said Jack, detaching a bit of plaster from the parapet, and dropping it with delicate aim on a bright spot on the water: "you are not right in considering me anything of the sort."

"Then perhaps you will tell me why you are here?"

"I will."

Jack turned around again and leaned his back against the parapet, crossing his knickerbockered legs and thrusting his hands into the pockets of his loose coat.

"I am here because I have a right to be here. I am engaged to your daughter, and until I have done something to forfeit my rights I shall consider myself engaged to her. She won't marry me, because she is in a morbid state of mind, excited principally by your suspicious treatment of her. I think that sooner or later she will come to see that she is making both of us miserable for a mere fancy; and when she *does* reach that point I mean to be on hand."

"And you hope to wear out my daughter's sense of self-respect by dogging her in this fashion?"

"No," drawled Jack, inspired to epigrammatic effort: "I only mean to insinuate a standard comparison, and let her see the uselessness of sacrificing a man who really loves and trusts her for a man who — doesn't."

"And you show your love and trust, and make her an object of public scandal at the same time, by following us about the country."

"I have not followed you here. I was here before you. There will be no public scandal unless *you* make it."

Mr. Ruthven was silent for a moment. With the sharp-pointed toe of his boot he ground a pebble into the dust. His voice was tremulous with anger as he spoke.

"Even at that risk, I propose to spare my daughter this persecution. If you will not leave this place —"

"I will not," interrupted Carnegie quietly.

"Then I shall take her away to some place where you cannot follow her."

"There is no place where I cannot follow her, Mr. Ruthven. Of course you can keep me out of any particular house; but the country is free to me. Wherever she is, she shall know that I am near when she wants me, and I don't doubt that she *will* want me before long. I am not going to annoy her; I have told her that already. I shall not even seek to communicate with her. But wherever you take her,

you will find me in the neighborhood. You perhaps observed a little pile of traps I had at Newport?"

Mr. Ruthven made no reply to this flippancy.

"Very well; I have stock enough there to enable me to start for any place in the United States at a moment's notice; and even if you get me down to following you over the Rocky Mountains with a hand-bag, follow you I will."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CHAMPION ARMED.

THE morning sun illuminated the long white corridors of the hotel at Luzerne. Mrs. Swift, flitting from a friend's room back to her own, saw through a half-open door her new friend, Mr. Kent, sitting before his writing-table.

She stopped to look at him. He had been writing, and the pen was still in his fingers. His eyes were fixed on the blank wall opposite him, and he was stroking the back of his head with his left hand, in a weary way. His chair was slightly tilted back, he was in his shirt-sleeves, and his attitude was commonplace and ungraceful; but there was something in its unconscious lassitude which touched Mrs. Swift's heart. She saw nothing unkindly, now, in the hard lines of his face; and at this moment there was a quiet sadness there which greatly softened it. Kent rarely showed his emotions in the expression of his features. Mrs. Swift had caught him off his guard — spiritually, as well as physically, in his shirt-sleeves. She felt a sympathy with him which was the more acute for a touch of remorse. This was one of the fruits of her misdoing, and although

she had grown used to contemplation of the crop, she could not but feel a little pang of pity. Adelaide was a woman of many kindly impulses, and most of them were dashed with mischief. She was sorry for Kent, and she wished to express her sorrow all the more because she knew she had no business to invade the privacy of his room while he was busy.

She sidled half inside the door, and then meekly inquired if she might come in.

Her host started a little, then smiled gravely, and rose to find her a seat, which she promptly took, casting on her way that quick glance about the room which women always bestow on the masculine barrenness of a man's apartment. It is possible that they expect to discover traces of concealed luxury underlying the Spartan simplicity.

"I suppose I'm intruding — you're at work, aren't you?"

"The work is finished."

"It's a shame that you can't have a holiday when you come out into the country," she said. "I'm sure you are working yourself to death."

This was but the usual feminine protest against the occupation with which the professional man strives to fight the mortal listlessness of rustication, and Kent merely smiled in answer.

Adelaide at once left generalities behind her.

"Mr. Kent, I don't want you to think that I do not know how badly I've behaved and am behaving. I lie awake nights thinking how mean I am. But I'm sure that if I have done wrong, I am getting my

punishment. I feel so ashamed of myself that I can't even read my Bible. I tried it the other day, and I came across an *awful* text the very first thing."

And the self-accusing sinner lifted up a white face of honest horror.

"Was it anything about 'salvation by works'?"

"No," she replied simply; "I was trying to bring myself to a better frame of mind; but *that* frightened me, and I couldn't read any more. It seemed as though it had been written exactly to fit my case. I knew that sort of thing happened in Shakspere, but—"

"But you expected something better of the Bible?"

Kent thought that there was a trace of affectation in the rather babyish frankness of her confession. She felt that he was laughing at her, and she hung her head and continued in a lower voice:

"I expected to find something that would help me to do right. Oh, I know how I've acted, and that I'm making everybody miserable—and you, too, Mr. Kent; and that's what makes me feel worst of all."

"You are making *me* miserable?" he repeated in a tone of surprise, and with a slight frown.

"Yes. I've made poor Faith miserable, and of course she won't marry any one while she has this dreadful sort of thing hanging over her—and, of course, you least of all—you can't say anything to her—it would seem almost insulting, and—oh, what a lot of trouble I *have* made."

Kent was walking up and down while she spoke. His face was dark and troubled; but in a few moments his quiet smile came back.

"I didn't know it was so obvious," he said.

"It's not — not in that way, I mean. I'm sure you are the last person in the world to let any one see what you really feel — you are so reserved and cold. But I saw it, and I know that I am keeping you two apart. Mr. Kent, why couldn't you go to her and tell her that I have owned up to you, and that you know that — you know the truth?"

"I'm afraid that wouldn't help matters much. Miss Ruthven is well aware that I never had a doubt of her."

"Yes," said Adelaide, trying not to sob, "that isn't the way at all. I can see that for myself. But if you told Mr. Ruthven — " she added, with a gleam of hope.

"In the first place, Mrs. Swift, I would tell neither Miss Ruthven nor Mr. Ruthven. The idea is impossible."

Adelaide was of the same opinion, although on different grounds. She viewed the matter in a practical light, with no side consideration of that mysterious male attribute called honor.

"I ought to do what you told me to," she moaned softly. "I ought to tell everything to Robert, and suffer the consequences, and do my whole duty religiously; but, oh, Mr. Kent, I can't, I'm such a coward. I know it would end everything between me and Robert."

"I don't think it would," he put in.

"Yes it would. Don't you remember how he went on that night? He's horribly jealous, though he cares so little for me now. I would never dare to tell him. If he'd only beat me, or something of that sort, and then forgive me, I would do it. But I am sure he would never let me see him again."

"You are all wrong, Mrs. Swift," Kent returned, shrugging his shoulders, and speaking in the tone of a man who simply re-affirms his position on a question too long fruitlessly discussed.

"If I could think so —" she began.

"You must remember that you have only an indiscretion to confess to your husband. What Miss Ruthven did for you has made you perfectly safe —"

"You can't reason with a woman," interrupted Adelaide, shaking her head; "of course, it is all true that you say; but I can't *feel* it."

"But you can reason with a man. Your husband was excited and unreasonable when you heard him. But now he cannot avoid recognizing the fact that you are telling him something which you would never tell him if there were anything wrong behind it. He will believe you."

"Not now — I'm afraid he won't. If this had happened three or four years ago — but he doesn't care enough for me now."

"He cares as much as ever he did. The only trouble is that you have spoiled him."

"Perhaps you think he never did care much for me?" cried Adelaide excitedly; "indeed he did,

He was very fond of me once, I can tell you. If I should show you —"

"What?"

"I *will* show you. Look here. I want you to read some of these letters. Those are what he wrote me five years ago. I had them out this very morning, crying over them."

And the poor woman dived into the pocket of her dress and drew out a packet of letters, somewhat worn and soiled at the edges, and blistered with obvious evidences of the owner's secret sorrow.

"Read them!" she said, thrusting them into Kent's hand, and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes.

Almost mechanically Kent took them. He had no desire to read them, but he ran his eye over one or two, to have an excuse for not looking at Adelaide, who was, as he phrased it in his thoughts, snivelling. Poetically-minded writers talk about the power of woman's tears to melt a man's heart. It is doubtful whether they affect that organ. But they certainly produce a nameless and creepy disgust, relief from which seems cheap, purchased at any cost.

"He loved me then," she sobbed from behind her handkerchief.

"Right you are!" said Kent.

He was moved to this vulgarly expressive assent by even a casual inspection of the letters. There was no doubt in his mind that Mr. Swift was earnestly in love at the time that he penned those

compositions. They were not at all in the usual style of the writer. It was not the Bob Swift that Kent knew whose soul here overflowed in ink. What Browning calls the "soul side," which Robert kept to show a woman when he loved her, was widely different from the one he faced the world with.

"Mrs. Swift," said Kent after a minute or two, during which time he read and she sobbed, "will you leave these letters with me for a while?"

"Wh — what do you want to do with them?"

"Can you trust them to me without asking any questions?"

"I want to know what you are going to do," she sobbed.

"Take them back, then," said Kent, holding them out to her.

"No — no!" she cried, instantly affrighted; "you keep them. Only won't you tell me — "

"Not a word. Unless you have entire confidence in my sincerity and my discretion, you had better take them back."

"I won't take them back," she replied petulantly, as she wiped her eyes; "of course you won't do anything wrong with them; but I'm sure you can't do any good either."

"I think I can," he said, coolly stowing the documents away in the pocket of his coat, into which garment he then slipped himself. "Now I wish you to promise me one thing," he went on, pulling down his cuffs in a business-like fashion; "if you

find — if you *feel*, as you prefer to put it — that you are wrong about your husband's affection for you, will you do your duty like a brave girl?"

"If —"

"If you are quite convinced that I am right. I ask nothing more."

"Oh, I wish I could be convinced."

"You will be," said Kent, picking up his hat.

"I should feel happy again, I do believe, if I only could find courage to tell him, and have it all over. Not that I believe I ever shall."

"You will."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"You can't do anything, Mr. Kent. You'll only make matters worse."

But her tone showed that she thought nothing of the kind. Hope was beginning to spring once more in her breast — hope inspired by confidence in his cleverness and his friendly interest. To tell the truth, poor Mrs. Swift was getting near that point of desperation where she would have accepted any proffered assistance. She had endeavored to fight for herself, had found it hard work, and was now willing to let some one else do her fighting for her. A little more and she would have been ready to trust herself to a child or a fool. When Kent came her way with a positive offer of help, she jumped at the chance.

Besides, she had already made a guess at what he intended to do with the letters. She thought that he meant to leave them somewhere where her

husband would find them, and, finding them, read them, and reading them, be affected to a revived and repentant love. Mr. Kent's real scheme was far more audacious.

"I hope you will succeed," she observed as Kent bowed her out of the door and followed her; "whatever it is you intend to do, I hope you will succeed, as much for your sake as for mine. You ought to have Faith Ruthven; you deserve her, and you are much more the right kind of husband for her than Jack — than Mr. Carnegie."

"Mr. Carnegie?" Kent repeated, stopping to look at her; "what has he to do with Miss Ruthven?"

"Oh, nothing," said Adelaide hurriedly, coloring as she spoke; "only he was supposed to be rather taken with her, you know."

"I did *not* know," Kent said, but his brows contracted. He did *not* know; but there were times when he had suspected something of the sort. Adelaide made haste to turn the conversation. She was a woman and a partisan, and Kent was her candidate for Faith's hand. She wished him success, and so she tried to hide her misgivings from herself.

"When shall I hear from you?" she asked as they parted at the head of the stairs.

"Soon," he replied briefly. As he went down in search of Swift he thought to himself, "This must be a short and sharp bit of work. I can't let things get cool."

Mr. Swift, in a gaudy cricketing-shirt, was occu-

pying himself with his new boat. It is characteristic of a certain class of men that the tools of their trade are also their toys. The horse-breeder cannot keep out of his stable; the actor spends in another theatre every moment he can spare from his own. There is a tradition of a certain proprietor of an evening paper who passed every Sunday of his life in his deserted composing-room. And when a man of this type has not to work for his living, he clings even more fondly to the implements of whatever employment he has chosen to take the place of regular labor. Even at times when they are out of use, the amateur sportsman loves to busy himself with his gun, his boat, his bicycle or his fishing-rod. Swift was turning his recent purchase over and examining every inch of wood in her. Nothing but a game of billiards or a flirtation would have amused him better.

"See here, Swift," said Kent, coming upon him with a serious face, "I want to have a talk with you in private."

"What's the matter, old man?"

"Get into that boat and pull me across the lake, and I'll tell you."

"But, I say — has anything happened?"

"Nothing new. Hurry up, will you? I can't talk here."

"What's the row? Give me some sort of an idea."

"I can't now. Here, heave her over."

Swift shifted his pipe to the other side of his

mouth, and assisted his friend. Swift was a cigar-smoker, but he had a fine eye for effect, and he thought that a pipe was more in harmony with the rustic recklessness of a flannel shirt.

They got in and rowed across the lake. Swift made one or two attempts to find out the nature of the trouble written in Kent's gloomy countenance, but he met with no success. Kent would not speak out until they had reached the opposite shore and landed in a quiet spot, where a couple of logs offered comfortable seats. Kent took one, and motioned his friend, who was about to sit by his side, toward the other. Swift obeyed the gesture, looking much puzzled. This arrangement placed them about ten feet apart, which struck Bob as being rather long range for a confidential communication.

"Swift," the other began slowly, "what I have to say to you is of an unpleasant nature — a very unpleasant nature. But of course you will understand that in this matter, so far as I am concerned, I am your friend."

"Of course, of course," returned Mr. Swift impatiently, "only out with it, old man! You're making me beastly nervous."

"You must allow me to choose my own way. It's an awkward business, and it's impossible to 'out with it' at once."

"Well, go ahead, anyway!" cried Bob as he skipped a flat stone over the water.

"I must begin at the beginning. You remember an unpleasant passage between us some time ago —"

"I remember some cursed nonsense —"

"It was not cursed nonsense. As I told you afterwards, I was somewhat excited at the time."

"You *were!*"

"You probably formed your own suppositions as to the cause of my excitement."

"I did," chuckled Swift.

"You were evidently quite off the track. You yourself were the cause of my excitement."

"*I?*"

"Yes, you. You had got yourself into trouble, and were going to get yourself into worse."

"Trouble? In what way?"

"In the way in which you have always got yourself into trouble. It is now five years since you married your wife —"

"Oh, I say, let my wife alone, will you!" cried Swift angrily, scowling black as night.

"No, I won't," returned Kent grimly; "that's what *you* did. That's what I have to talk to you about now, and you must listen."

"I will not listen. I told you then, and I tell you now, that I consider it an impertinence — a damnable impertinence."

"And I told you then, and I tell you now, that, impertinence or no impertinence, I shall say what I think necessary, and if you won't hear it in one way, you will have to hear it in another. Come, now, be reasonable. You know perfectly well that I wouldn't burn my fingers with your affairs if I could help it. You can listen to me now, and if you consider it an

impertinence when I am done — why, let that be the end of any acquaintance between us. We might as well have this thing settled now as later."

Swift sat in sulky silence, looking down at the ground. He was clay in Kent's hands, as usual, and now, as before, the thought that Kent was capable of forgetting his manly fealty left poor Bob no heart for fight.

"Yes," his torturer resumed, "five years ago you married a girl who loved you dearly — loved you in a way that would have been enough for most men. It was not enough for you. In a year you had grown tired of her. You had been accustomed to having women in love with you, and the love of one woman couldn't satisfy you — even though that one was worth all the rest of the flighty fools who ran after you because you were good-looking — for you *were* good-looking then."

Swift had been writhing in an agony of suppressed rage, and now Kent heard him draw in a fierce breath between his teeth.

"For five years," Kent went on, "you have systematically neglected a woman whose affections you were once very much flattered to have won. You have abused her confidence and laughed at her love. You haven't even had the decency to conceal your infidelities. You have flaunted the scalps of your victims before all the world, until at last the poor child has grown absolutely callous to the shame you have put upon her, and she doesn't care now who knows how cheap you hold her."

Swift struck the log a tremendous blow with his fist.

"By God! that's false!" he cried.

"It is true. Oh, she used to mind it. When the women treated her to their ostentatious pity, and the men said, so that she should hear, 'what a fool that Swift is!'"

"The men!" he broke in, looking up with dilated eyes.

"Oh, yes. Mind you, all the time this poor girl was eating out her heart in neglect, she had only to raise her pretty little finger to have men at her feet worth a dozen of you, Bob Swift!"

"But she never did!" he cried, with a sudden chill horror coming over him at the cruel suggestiveness of Kent's tone.

"*How do you know?*"

Swift started to his feet and sprang forward.

"Now, by the Lord!"

Kent had risen. His hand was in the breast of his coat. Robert stopped short, horrified — not touched by any bodily fear of cold lead, but horrified that Kent should be capable of "drawing on" him.

Kent's hand came slowly out of his breast. It held a packet of letters. Robert stood dumb and motionless.

"Swift, have I your promise that you will not try to touch these letters?"

"No!"

"They are not signed. I will give them to you if you will hear what I have to say. If you do not, you shall never know who wrote them."

There was a dead silence for a minute. The stronger will conquered. Bob Swift sat down again upon the log, and hid his face in his hands. What Kent chose to say, what delay he wished to make, were matters of no moment to the poor wretch just then. He heard what was said to him as if it were spoken from afar off.

"These are letters written to your wife. I do not wish to pain you unnecessarily, but I must read you one or two lines before I give them to you. This is the first: 'My darling Adelaide'—"

"*My darling Adelaide!*" Swift's voice, as he repeated the words in a mechanical fashion, was almost a groan.

"No," said Kent dryly, "*his* darling Adelaide. 'I got your precious letter. Oh, believe me, my own, I shall never forget what I owe you for taking pity upon me. I am a poor sort of fellow, I know; but believe me, my love shall die with me,'—that's not the one—oh, here: 'My sweet white lily'—"

"*Eh!*" Swift raised his head, and looked up with a dull wonder in his eyes; "*he* calls her 'sweet white lily'?"

"So it seems—hm—'swe'wi'lily'—" Kent ran the words together in a brutally careless way: "'I waited for you at Lord and Taylor's for three hours this afternoon until all the clerks were laughing at me'—"

"What?" screamed Swift, leaping up again. Kent drew back and went on with his reading. A smile curved the corners of his mouth.

"He must have been very far gone. 'Only to hear your whisper again those dear words you spoke last night — do you remember then?' —"

"Give me those letters!"

Swift rushed at him, and Kent yielded up the package. One glance was enough. Bob tottered on his feet, waved his arms wildly in the air, gave a hysterical laugh, and then burst into tears and sat down again, his hands to his face. The letters were scattered on the ground before him.

"O my God!" he gasped, while Kent picked up the papers: "mine — mine! I — oh — Kent, I'll kill you — I'll — old man, old man, old man!"

He stretched out one hand, the other covering his eyes. The revulsion of feeling had made a very child of him. There was no resentment mixed with his sense of relief. His was not a great soul, perhaps, but it had been stirred to its depths. He had suffered three minutes of the acutest torture, and he was simply grateful that it was over.

"It was all a scare?" he murmured.

"Rather a solid scare, my boy."

Swift had learned his lesson.

"How could you do it, old man?" he said in mild reproach: "you've broken me all up. Look at me, will you? — crying, damned if I ain't. O Lord! I suppose I ought to knock you down; but I know it's a fact — it's all right, that is. I've been a hog — I've treated her shamefully. 'Tisn't a damn bit more than I deserve. God bless her soul! I say, look here," he babbled on, seizing the letters and

searching among them: "this is what I waited to hear her say — see here!"

And he pointed to the passage at which Kent had stopped.

"*Bob, I will break my heart if you ever forget me.*"

"The heart has stood a good chance of being pretty well smashed," was Kent's comment. "Swift, my boy, you must forgive me; but I saw that it was time to do something. The matter was getting pretty grave. Yes, I am telling you the truth now. This was only a 'scare;' but there was a time when it came near being something worse. Go to your wife — she has her confession to make — it's not a very fearful one; but that's not *your* fault."

"You're right," Swift remarked, with a solemn face; "I might have driven her to almost anything. But, on my soul, I never realized how far I'd been going until now. I suppose I ought to thank you; but, by Jove, you put it in pretty heavy."

"Had to," said Kent; "there, go on by yourself. I'll walk around. I want to be alone. Hear what she has to say, and be good to her."

Swift wrung his friend's hand, and took a step toward the boat. Then he turned again.

"I say, Kent, it wasn't her fault about disappointing me that day at Lord and Taylor's. She —"

"Go on!" said Kent, laughing; and he went on.

Kent watched him pulling vigorously across the little lake.

"I suppose that's good for six weeks — well, no — five," he reflected.

It was past dinner-time when he got back to the hotel, and he was in the darkened dining-room, trying to make a meal out of the general wreck, when, in the temporary absence of the last lingering waiter, Kent suddenly felt a pair of warm gauze-clad arms about his neck; and a beautiful glowing face bent over, and he was kissed before he knew it, and Mrs. Robert Swift stood off blushing furiously.

"Don't be angry," she pleaded. It seemed the height of audacity to kiss Kent without his permission: "I couldn't help it — you've made me so happy. I've told him all, and he won't even blame me enough, and the rest is *so* easy, and he loves me more than ever he did — and it's all *you!*"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIC VOS NON VOBIS.

SEATED on the edge of her bed, on that second night of her stay at Milford, Faith saw through the open window a patch of moonlight upon the road, across which passed a tall and manly figure in loosely picturesque garb. She knew it at once, and her heart leaped up in her breast. She went softly to the window and looked out, and her eyes followed Carnegie far down the road. Long after his footsteps had died away, long after she had heard her father re-enter, she hung over the sill, looking up through the drooping elm-boughs at the warm, dark summer sky, and down at the little strip of garden between her and the road, where the night wind softly waved the tall heads of the hollyhocks and touched the dusky beds of old-fashioned flowers, setting the long stems a-quiver, and brought up to her the breath of the rose-bushes. She knew now that she was not sorry he had followed her. She knew that the sense of his presence was sweet to her heart beyond all telling, and a mysterious trust filled her soul that the love at her door must sooner or later lift the latch and enter, never to go out more.

On the next day she took up the quiet round of life with a lighter heart. Her father was grave and pale; but he made no reference to Carnegie, directly or indirectly, and he seemed to have settled down into a dignified acceptance of a course of events which he could not control.

And soon they dropped into the usual social routine of a small watering-place. They found a few old and made many new acquaintances — that is, Faith did. There were hops at the other hotels, and little walking-parties. The chief charm of Milford is that it is a fine field for walking-parties. Almost every day a few of the summer idlers would gather together and explore the surrounding country, the women in short skirts of rough material and brilliant hues, the men in flannels of soberer tints. They went down the long curve of river road to "Dingman's," where they saw the Ramyskill flashing over a half-dozen rocky falls, here spurting wildly in a narrow jet, there spreading out into a silvery veil over a moss-covered slope of stone. They wandered up the tortuous ravine of the Sawkill, and, standing by night on the edge of the shadowy pit in which the highest fall is lost, saw the dark arena turned into a fiery cauldron by the glare of a tiny fire at the bottom. They scaled the pleasant low hills and lost themselves in the quiet woods. On moonlight nights they rowed on the calm river or danced old quadrilles in the cool dining-rooms of the hotels, while the servants stood outside and watched them through the windows. It was a less

formal life than Faith had ever led; she was pleased with its freedom and simplicity, and she fell in at once with her chance companions, who were, the most of them, amiable, unaffected folk from Philadelphia. Mr. Ruthven held aloof from the people around him, slept and smoked away the better part of the time, and probably enjoyed himself after his own manner, although he gave himself certain airs of martyrdom, and pretended to be thoroughly bored. But Faith felt herself at home before she had been in Milford a week.

Jack Carnegie kept out of her way. She sometimes saw him at a distance, and once they spoke, in the pauses of the lancers, danced in the dining-room of "Dimmick's," to the music of a piano and a fiddle. But he stuck bravely to his promise, and did not obtrude his society upon her. This was not difficult. The people of the different hotels formed little cliques; the Sawkillites fought rather shy of the Dimmickites, and the "cottage folks" at the river end of the town had very little to do with the boarders at the "French Hotel" up on the Port Jervis road. There was a friendly interchange of courtesies; but each party made up its little excursions among its own members. Still, he was there; she could never overlook the fact that he was there. She heard of him constantly; he was a social star in this smaller system, even as he had been at Newport, and every letter she received from her friends in that neglected seaport bewailed his absence.

And Faith was content — content with a glimpse

of his broad shoulders as he pulled a boat in the Delaware, with a glance as he passed the veranda where she was sitting, with the sound of his clear voice among the chattering crowd that gathered on the Bluff of an evening — content that he was there, and content — more than content, proud, when she thought of his fidelity and his determination. Who in the place could have guessed that he was there for her sake alone? She hugged her secret to her breast, and loved him for his self-restraint, and was content and proud.

She had been a fortnight in Milford, and had learned to wander about unrestrictedly, when one evening, just after their early dinner, she took it into her head to go down to the Glen, a little natural park that lay on the other side of the creek running parallel with the road to the river, between that stream which the natives called the Sawkill River, and the Knob, an oversized hill that frowned upon the whole town, an aggressive hill, of bold and rugged outlines, a mountain in proportions, though not in dimensions. This was a gathering-place of romantic spirits at a late hour in the evening, and Faith expected to find company by the time that she should wish to return to the hotel.

It was scarcely seven when she closed behind her the door of the low long room which had already begun to wear a homelike air, with her pretty possessions scattered about it, and with new-found treasures of grasses and flowers on tables and shelves. She strolled down the road, crossed the intersecting

thoroughfare, and sought the winding path that led across a footbridge to the Glen. When she had got a little beyond the hotel to the cross-roads, she turned her head, by mere accident, and saw a tall man in gray clothes standing on the veranda.

"He looks like Mr. Kent," she thought, as she passed on. The light was already on the wane. Cecil Kent, looking after her, wondered if it were Miss Ruthven or only some one like her, and debated in his mind the propriety of following her to find out. But he was not a man of impulse, and he had come to Milford with a certain purpose.

"I had best see the old gentleman at once," he reflected; "and it is all the better that I should see him alone."

He hurried up the street down which Faith had idled a few moments before, and tracked Mr. Ruthven from his hotel to his lodgings, where he sent up his card and waited in the common parlor, a low-ceiled room, in which the musty smell of varnished mahogany and horsehair upholstery, grown strong through a winter of closed doors and shutters, struggled with the breath of the roses that floated in through the open windows.

Mr. Ruthven presently appeared, and greeted him with a cordiality faintly tinged with mistrust. The old gentleman liked Kent, but he had grown suspicious of all mankind, of late.

"You are surprised to see me, Mr. Ruthven, and I fear I must surprise you still more. I am here on a most delicate business. And I should tell you at

once that I have the only excuse a man can have for intruding upon a matter that I know is sacredly private."

"I have every reason to believe," said Mr. Ruthven, formal and deliberate, but with an uneasy look in his eyes, "that you are the last man, Mr. Kent, to be guilty of any indelicate — er — interference with my private affairs."

"I am glad to hear you say so; for I must ask your indulgence if I am obliged to make an awkward explanation. Mr. Ruthven, I did not tell you the whole truth when I gave you to understand that I met your daughter in the street on that evening when I saw her home."

"Ah!" said Mr. Ruthven, paling.

"I was in my friend Carnegie's studio, and I have learned since then that you know a part of what passed there — not all."

"Not all?" repeated the elder man, with an ashen face.

"Not all. Excuse me if I say, Mr. Ruthven, that I believe you have done your daughter a great injustice in your thoughts."

"Mr. Kent — "

"Allow me to go on. I have told you that I have a personal interest in this matter. Will you please read this letter?"

Ruthven opened the envelope. It contained a long letter, wrapped in a single sheet of paper. On the single sheet was written:

"MY DEAR MR. RUTHVEN:

"I send you this letter from my wife at her request. It is not necessary for me to add anything to this act of justice. Yours very truly,

"ROBERT SWIFT."

The letter enclosed was from Adelaide, a long, rather inconsequent and very gushy document, telling all the truth she had to tell, and enlarging on her own wickedness and Faith's nobility of character. Mr. Ruthven read it through in silence, and then looked up at Kent.

"How did Mrs. Swift come to — er — write this letter?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"She did not do this of her own motion, I suppose. Was it you who — er — influenced her?"

"Yes."

"May I ask your motive?"

"Certainly. I knew something of your daughter's unpleasant position, and I have made it my business to — well, to put matters straight," he said with a smile. "Of course, until this was done, it would have been offering an insult to your daughter to approach her as anything more than a friend. So, you see, my motives have not been altogether unselfish."

And he smiled again. Mr. Ruthven did not smile. There was a look of perplexed pain on his face.

"You have read that letter. Is it not — enough?"

"Yes," Ruthven answered hesitatingly; "but — Mr. Kent, this letter does not explain *why* my daughter went to Mr. Carnegie's studio."

"She went there to protect Mrs. Swift," Kent answered, with a firmness that perhaps he did not feel.

"Did Mrs. Swift tell you that?"

"Mrs. Swift knows no more about it than I do. It seems to me that there can be no doubt about the matter. Are you not satisfied with the explanation Mrs. Swift has given?"

"Yes."

"And I may speak to your daughter?"

Ruthven did not answer. He sat back in his chair with a frown on his face. His mind was much disturbed. He was angry with Adelaide that she had not told Kent of Carnegie's relations to Faith; but when he reflected that Adelaide could at best but guess at the truth, and when he himself tried to face the difficulty, he could not blame the woman for her mistaken kindness. Ruthven liked Kent. He would not have chosen him for a son-in-law, perhaps; but as an alternative to Carnegie, Kent seemed perfection itself. And Kent, after all, would have been more than endurable in this capacity. Kent was one of the few men in New York in whose artistic scholarship Ruthven had thorough belief. Kent could appreciate the Ruthven collection, which was some day to be the nucleus of a great museum — one of the great museums of the world. Kent was quite a different type of man from this vulgarly dashing daubster who was fated to bear Faith away. Kent was a man to be respected, and Ruthven had for him something of that respect which he felt for a

true and undoubted work of art. He shrank from giving Kent pain, as he would have shrunk from breaking an Etruscan vase.

The subject of his thoughts misconstrued his silence.

"Not now," he explained; "but when I have reason to believe that she can care for me. I think she will learn to care for me, Mr. Ruthven."

"Do you?" said the old man, who scarcely knew what words were on his tongue.

"Don't *you?*"

"I don't know," Ruthven answered half testily, recovering himself; "I have nothing to say about the matter. It rests with my daughter, entirely. Please don't consult me — er — talk to Faith — yes, talk to Faith."

Both men rose and moved toward the door. Mr. Ruthven walked behind his guest, his hands playing nervously with the letter he held. There was a friendly distress in his eye that was lost on Kent.

"You won't stay, I suppose, and smoke a cigar? — no, of course not — you are — er — tired, and all that. I'll see you to-morrow. Faith has just gone out for a walk."

"Yes, I know," said Kent cheerily.

"I — er — of course I ought to thank you for what you have done. It's — er — very noble of you. You've taken a great — er — weight off my mind. I wish this thing had — yes, had never happened. I wish — other things were different."

Kent turned to look at him; but Ruthven lowered his eyes.

"Yes, I'll see you to-morrow," he went on hastily. "You've been very good — yes, very good indeed, and I'm sure my daughter — Faith will be extremely — er — grateful to you. Good-evening."

He shook Kent's hand with an attempt at vigor which he evidently intended for cordiality, and retreated into the parlor.

"The old man is quite unstrung," said Kent to himself, as he went down the street toward the Glen; "I didn't know he had so much feeling in him."

And Mr. Ruthven, being left alone — to his credit be this said, for it is the last that is here said of him — brought his fist down on the table in his sympathetic rage, and swore a right round Saxon oath.

Faith found that she had the Glen to herself. Milford's thousand guests were enjoying after-dinner peace on the hotel verandas, and she alone, it seemed, had an eye for the beauty of the young evening. The warm low light fell upon the grass under the tall trees. Tremulous shadows gathered in the hollows along the banks of the creek.

She wandered on and on, through the Glen and down a wild-wood path by the brookside. Here the trees were thicker, and she brushed through clumps of wild laurel bushes and rhododendrons whose waxy buds exhaled a faint and sickly scent. She heard the stream tinkling near her, and the homing-birds twittering above her. Now and then a pine-cone fell with a soft sudden thud. All else was silent, until she came on a little clear space and heard voices. She looked up and stood gazing in amazement.

An Indian, in a blanket and profuse war-paint, sat beside a small fire of picturesquely arranged fagots. His head drooped on his breast, and his bare arms hung idly down. A bow had fallen from his right hand. He was motionless, but he was speaking.

"Yes, great chief, Spotted-Thunder has not known such miseries these many moons. The children of the white man persecute him with pea-shooters."

Faith heard Carnegie's laugh, and, looking further, saw him sitting at an easel, working away as though every second of light were precious.

"Why the deuce do you go round in that rig when you are not sitting, you old maniac? Somebody will shoot you next."

There was a world of dignity in Megilp's tone as he asked, —

"Mr. Carnegie, sir, do you want to paint 'The Lost Injun,' or do you not?"

"I do."

"Very well, then. How do you expect you're going to get any sort of a picture out of it, if I don't throw no conscientiousness into my part of the work? Ugh!"

The grunt with which he closed his speech, by way of emphasizing his absorption in the character he had assumed, was too strangely comic for Faith's self-control. She was on the edge of flight, but she could not restrain a little laugh. Carnegie heard her, glanced up, and sprang to his feet.

"Faith!" he cried.

She stood still, and he came toward her. Megilp looked over his shoulder, took in the situation, gave a grunt of contempt and disappointment, rose, and began to pack up his employer's "traps."

"You are not going to run away from me," Carnegie went on reproachfully; "I have given you no reason to distrust me, have I? I have kept my word — I have not persecuted you."

Faith could not speak. She turned her head away, and made a movement of retreat. Carnegie saw her face.

"Ah!" he cried; "it is not I from whom you are running away — it is yourself!"

He caught her hands and held them. She was trembling, and her eyes fell before his.

"O Faith, hasn't there been enough of this? How much longer is it to go on?"

She tried to draw away from him.

"You promised me —"

"Oh, yes, I promised that I would do nothing to give you pain. But you are torturing yourself. Don't deny it! How can I see you suffering, and stand off when I know that I can make you happy if you will only let me?"

She shook off his grasp, and wrung her hands as she answered him, with a passionate cry, —

"'If I would let you!' Why do you torture me so? You know I cannot — you know it does not rest with me!"

Her speech ended in a sob. He held out his arms to her, but she drew back and dropped to the ground, and hid her face in her hands.

"Megilp, go!" Carnegie called; but Megilp was already gone, and, with his burden on his back, was crashing through the bushes a hundred yards away.

"Faith," her betrothed said, sitting down beside her, "I don't want you to say that I am torturing you. I am only trying to make you see the truth. You are wasting the best time of our lives, you are perilling our happiness, for a mere fancy, — no, I do not speak harshly, — you are over-sensitive, and you fancy a danger that does not exist."

She did not raise her head, but sobbed as she listened.

"You attach more importance to this matter than it deserves. What is it, after all? You were in my studio — your husband's studio."

Faith shook her head. Her face was still hidden from him.

"Yes, that is all. What does it amount to? What is it that troubles you? Do you believe that Kent — that he has a wrong impression?"

She lifted her head to answer, —

"No."

"Then what is it? That miserable Bob Swift? He won't say anything, and it doesn't matter what he thinks. Is it your father? Your father is — "

"He is my father," she interrupted: "do not forget that, Jack."

"I don't forget it, my darling; but, great God! you can't let that man's absurd suspicion stand in the way of our happiness. It isn't possible that he has any real doubt of you — that anybody could really doubt — "

"Anybody — everybody — would doubt, I fear, Jack."

"Look here, Faith. Did you doubt me when you found Adelaide there?"

"I heard what you said to her."

"But before that?"

"I did not — did not *doubt* you, Jack; but when I knew what there had been between you, it gave me pain."

He bent his head and pressed his lips to her hand almost reverently.

"My own true girl," he said: "I only ask you to think whether you are not deceiving yourself now. There is no such cruel necessity as you imagine. I love you, Faith, as I never loved any woman before. That is the simple truth. I have had my fancies as a boy, and I have indulged them. But I *love* you. Now, are we to be parted for an indefinite time — and there may be no end to it — just because you fear a misconstruction of a simple and noble action? My love, remember, it is of no earthly importance what any one else may think — it is only you and I who are concerned — only we two."

Faith looked him full in the face. A faint blush came into her pale cheeks as she spoke.

"'Only we two!' But — but — there might not always be only we two."

The blush deepened, but her pure sweet eyes still looked in his.

"Jack, could I look a child — *my* child — *yours*" — the tears fell and the small mouth quivered with

agony of womanly shame — "in the face if this story were known. If a daughter came to me and said, 'I have heard this — ' what should I answer? Jack, Jack, if you love me, you cannot ask me to sacrifice what is better than happiness."

"If I love you!" the man cried, rising to his feet, for she was now standing erect; "*if I love you!* I have not one other thought in life than you, and you know it. Faith, don't try me too hard."

"It is not I, Jack," she answered, simply; "we are unfortunate, that is all."

"'That is all?' But I tell you it is all a delusion!"

"Is it? Jack, you have it in your power to put everything right in one moment."

"*I* have?"

"Tell my father the truth — that Adelaide was there."

She spoke calmly, looking directly at him. Carnegie fairly turned white, and then reddened up to his temples.

"Good God! Faith, I can't do that. It — it's impossible!"

"Why?" she asked him.

"Because — because it would be most indecent — dishonorable."

"If you care so much for your honor, do you wish me to care less for mine?"

Her sweet voice was calm and even. It fell on Carnegie's ear like the judgment of an inexorable fate. He had nothing to answer. No apt form of words, no clever casuistry, would avail him here.

There was a moment of silence. Jack's brain whirled, and there was a ringing in his ears, yet he could distinctly hear a squirrel rattling up the shagbark hickory behind him.

The next thing that they both heard was a footstep, heavy and regular, coming down the path, and in another moment Kent stood before them.

What was it that Kent saw? Only two young people enjoying the sunset, and strolling down a woodland path which anybody might follow — as he had followed it.

"Why, old man!" Carnegie hailed him.

"Mr. Kent!" Faith cried, and he misinterpreted the meaning of the color in her face.

Then there were the usual greetings. Yes, he had just arrived from Luzerne. He had seen Mr. Ruthven. He had come to Milford on — business. He did not know how long he should stay.

And then Carnegie stepped aside to pick up some brushes that Megilp had dropped, and Kent, full of his new hope and courage, could contain himself no longer, but had to fulfil his mission at once.

"Miss Ruthven," he said, "Mrs. Swift was at Luzerne, and she gave me this letter for you."

A new look of fright came into Faith's face as she took the letter, and vanished as she read it.

It was a short letter:

"My Dearest, Sweetest Faith, —

"I may call you so now, for I have done penance, and confessed all to my own dear husband and to

your father, so it is all right again, and there is no misunderstanding. And, oh, I feel as if the weight of a *world* were off my mind. Robert is perfectly devoted, and I am *so* happy, and *so* grateful to you, and *so* ashamed of my *meanness* and *jealousy* and *cruelty*. When you will let me, I will come and beg your pardon, and I know you will forgive me. I am so deliriously *happy* that I can scarcely tell you how thoroughly I appreciate your *noble sacrifice*. How much you must have suffered for me! But it is all over now, and you must not think too hardly of your loving and grateful

"ADELAIDE."

When Faith had read this she dropped the letter on the ground and cried out, —

"*O Jack, it's all over! We can be happy now!*"

And before Kent had picked up the paper that lay at his feet, she was in Jack Carnegie's arms, laughing and crying, and glad with a great and all-sufficing gladness that shut out for the moment a world of fears and sacrifices and disappointments and brave and futile endeavor.

"Kent," Carnegie said, as he released one hand and stretched it out, "congratulate me, old man. We were engaged before that infernal row, and it's all right now."

"I congratulate you," said Kent. They were not looking at him, and the shadows that were creeping up the slender white trunks of the birches hid his hard face. If that shadow should never

leave his face, who would notice? But there was light enough yet in the twilight world to read by, and Kent read on the back page of Adelaide Swift's letter:

"*This is all Mr. Kent's doing. He has made me happy, and I hope he will make you happy, Faith. He is the only man in this world who is worthy of you.*"

"Here is your letter, Miss Ruthven," he said when Carnegie let her go. But before he handed it to her he tore off the last page. She looked a little surprised.

"You are tearing my letter, Mr. Kent."

"There was nothing on that page. I looked for something; but — there was nothing."

He began to twist the page into a spill.

"Let me do it," said Faith, who was blushing foolishly. She rolled it deftly into the proper form, bent down and caught a light from the last embers of the little fire, and held it up to Kent's cigar.

"Let me steady your hand," he said, for indeed her hand trembled; and he held the little fingers until the blue flame burned almost to the end.

"Take care!" cried Carnegie.

"I can trust Mr. Kent," returned Faith, smiling up at him.

"You may," Kent said gravely. "Shall we go back?"

He threw the bit of paper away, and it fell on the hot bed of the fire, and flashed up red, and died out.

They walked slowly up the path, talking commonplaces. In the Glen, Carnegie lingered with Faith. Kent bade them good-night with a smile, and went his way. A minute after, looking up, they saw him sauntering across the little bridge, the smoke of his cigar rising dimly gray in the darkening air.

"What a dear good fellow he is!" whispered Faith.

"A royal old boy," assented Jack Carnegie; "strange he hasn't a spark of sentiment in him."

"I wish he were as happy as we are," Faith said softly; "O Jack, he ought to marry some nice girl."

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